NATION

Over 50 Delhi schools receive fresh bomb threats

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BUSINESS

Indian Oil, BPCL resume purchasing Russian oil

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SPORTS

Indian men's hockey team announced for AC

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 21 AUGUST 2025 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 26 SAFAR, 1447 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 228 | Pages: 8

THE VOTE 'THEFT' CONUNDRUM

ANUSHREE CHAKRABORTY & AMINA AFAQ

The country is witnessing a political showdown like never before. It started on 7 August when Congress leader Rahul Gandhi dropped a "bomb" and accused the Election Commission of India of helping BJP steal votes during the 2024 LS elections. Gandhi cited poll data of Mahadevapura in Bengaluru Central, and claimed that there were 1 lakh manipulated entries. However, this is not the Congress' fight alone. Gandhi found support in hundreds of Opposition lawmakers, and they announced a rally in Bihar against the EC, accusing it of not upholding the "one person, one vote" principle of a democracy. Incidentally, EC held a press conference on 17 August, the same day as the rally and aggressively accused the Opposition of making baseless allegations. CEC Gyanesh Kumar was the man of the hour and went through great effort to counter the Oppn's claims. However, turns out many of Kumar's claims crumble under scrutiny. Salar News cuts through the noise to point out some of the discrepancies.

>>>*See more on Page 3*

Govt brings bill in LS to sack PM, CMs arrested for 30 days

Oppn tears bill & throws it at Shah; LS sends it to JPC

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Tempers ran high in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday as Home Minister Amit Shah introduced three contentious Bills aimed at the removal of the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and other ministers if they remain in custody for 30 consecutive days on serious criminal charges.

Opposition MPs launched fierce protests, tearing and flinging copies of the Bills and shouting slogans. The Bills introduced were the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2025, the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2025. Shah proposed their referral to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) of 31 members—21 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha—with a report due by the first week of the next session in November.

The proposed laws state that any Prime Minister, Union Minister or Chief Minister arrested and detained for 30 consecutive days for an offence punishable with five years or more would automatically lose their position on the 31st day.

Opposition leaders, including Asaduddin Owaisi, Manish Tewari, NK Premachandran, KC Venugopal, and Dharmendra Yadav, called the Bills unconstitutional, anti-federal, and open to political misuse. Premachandran accused the government of rushing the legislation, which Shah rejected, stressing that all parties would have a say during committee deliberations.

The protests peaked when TMC MPs, including Mahua Moitra, Jothimani, and Praniti Shinde, distributed and tore copies of the Bills. As the uproar continued, Speaker Om Birla condemned the unruly behaviour, noting it had lowered the dignity of Parliament. Security marshals and Parliament Security Service personnel were deployed briefly to control the situation before being called back.

On Shah's proposal, the bills were sent by the House to a Joint Committee of Parliament comprising 21 members from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha for scrutiny.

The committee, whose members will soon be named, has been asked to submit its report to the House by the last day of the first week of the next session, expected in the third week of November.

The House was later adjourned until 5pm. *—PTI*

>>>*More on Page 4*

Torn papers fly as Home Minister Amit Shah addresses Lok Sabha amid Opposition protests on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

> **Now, the people of the country will have to decide whether it is appropriate for a minister, chief minister or the prime minister to run the government while in jail** —Amit Shah, Home Minister

RIJIJU ACCUSED OF ASSAULTING WOMEN MPs IN LOK SABHA

Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee has alleged that Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju and Ravneet Singh Bittu assaulted party MPs Shatabdi Roy and Mitali during Wednesday's protest in the Lok Sabha. "They pushed our women MPs while we were shouting slogans," Banerjee claimed, demanding Bittu's resignation. The BJP dismissed the allegations as "baseless", with MP Sanjay Jaiswal denying any manhandling. Lok Sabha Secretariat sources said CCTV footage was reviewed and showed no evidence of pushing. Officials noted that opposition MPs had charged towards the treasury benches but no assault was recorded.

Ravneet Singh Bittu (left) and Kiren Rijiju (right **PHOTO: SANSAD TV/ANI**

POKER NO MORE

LS passes bill to ban real-money online games

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG 2025

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025, banning the operation, facilitation, and advertisement of online games involving real money. The bill was passed without debate due to Opposition protests over electoral roll revisions in Bihar.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, introducing the legislation, stated the move aims to tackle rising cases of addiction, financial fraud, and money laundering linked to real-money gaming apps. Offenders may face imprisonment of up to three years and/or fines reaching Rs 1 crore.

While banning monetary gaming, the government emphasised its intent to promote e-sports and social gaming, with plans to establish a dedicated regulatory authority. Vaishnaw stressed the economic and personal toll of unregulated online money gaming, citing its misuse and associated financial harms.

The bill now awaits passage in the Rajya Sabha to become law. The House was adjourned shortly after amid ongoing opposition sloganeering.*—PTI*

>>>*More on Pages 4, 7 & 8*

THE MONEY GAME

- Rs 20,000 crore lost every year by 45 crore people in online real money gaming, govt says.
- Rs 2 lakh crore is the valuation of online gaming industry.
- Rs 31,000 crore is the annual revenue
- Rs 20,000 crore contribution in direct and indirect taxes.

India test-fires 'Agni 5' ballistic missile

BALASORE, 20 AUG

India on Wednesday successfully test-fired the Agni 5 intermediate-range ballistic missile from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha. The Defence Ministry confirmed that the launch validated all operational and technical parameters and was conducted under the Strategic Forces Command. This follows the previous successful trial on 11 March 2024, when DRDO tested the missile with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) technology. India first tested Agni 5 on 19 April, 2012. The missile has a range of over 5,000 km and can reach altitudes up to 600 km. *—PTI*

India, China reach new border understanding

BEIJING, 20 AUG

India and China have reached new common understandings on normalised management and control of their boundary, Beijing said on Wednesday, following Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi from 18-19 August. Wang met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, participating in the 24th round of Special Representatives talks. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning stated that both sides agreed to maintain peace in border areas, address sensitive zones, and initiate boundary negotiations where feasible. *—PTI*

Russia to supply oil to India at 5% discount amid tariffs

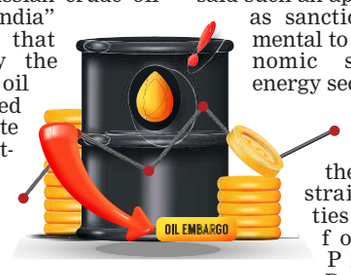
NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Russia will continue to supply oil to India at a 5 percent discount, despite the pressure and sanctions on the latter from the United States. Deputy Trade Representative of Russia to India, Evgeniy Griva, on Wednesday, said that, "There will be a 5 per cent discount, subject to negotiation, on Russian crude oil purchases to India" and added that approximately the same level of oil will be imported by India, despite the political situation.

Russia has a "special mechanism" to confront any challenge arising out of the US slapping punitive measures against India for its procurement of Russian crude oil, Russian charge d'affaires Roman Babushkin said.

Terming the US pressure on India for its procurement of Russian crude oil is "unjustified, he said Russia was confident that India-Russia energy cooperation will continue notwithstanding the external pressure,. It is a "challenging" situation for India, he said at a media briefing and added that, we have "trust" in our ties with New Delhi.

The Russian charge d'affaires flayed the unrelenting American pressure on India to stop buying Russian oil and said such an approach as well as sanctions are detrimental to the global economic stability and energy security.



Babushkin's remarks came against the backdrop of strain in India's ties with the US following President Donald Trump doubling tariffs on Indian goods to 50 per cent that included an additional penalty of 25 per cent for purchasing Russian crude oil. To a question, he said the role of BRICS as a stabilising force will increase amid the ongoing global turbulence. *—PTI*

>>>*More on Page 4*

Man slaps, attacks Delhi CM at public event

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was assaulted during a 'Jan Sunwai' at her Civil Lines camp office on Wednesday morning in what her office has called a "well-planned conspiracy to kill her".

The attacker, Rajesh Sakriya, 41, a resident of Rajkot, Gujarat, approached the CM posing as a petitioner. He slapped, pushed, and pulled her hair before being overpowered by security personnel. Gupta sustained injuries to her hand, shoulder, and head, said PWD Minister Parvesh Verma.

Delhi Police confirmed the registration of a case under Section 109(1) (attempt to murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Civil Lines police station. The accused has also been charged with assaulting and obstructing a public servant.

Rajesh Sakriya **PHOTO: PTI**

- BJP MLA shared a photo on Facebook where Sakaria is purportedly seen standing besides AAP MLA.

Police sources revealed that Sakriya had arrived in Delhi two days earlier and was staying in the Civil Lines area. Though he wasn't carrying a weapon—possibly to avoid detection—he had a bag containing clothes and documents.

He is currently being jointly interrogated by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Delhi Police's Special Cell.

While the motive remains unclear, senior officials have described the attack as serious and potentially life-threatening, though conspiracy charges have not yet been filed.

BJP MLA from Delhi, Harish Khurana, shared a photo on Facebook where Sakaria is purportedly seen standing besides Gopal Italia, Aam Aadmi Party MLA from Visavadar in Gujarat. The BJP leader sought an explanation from AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal.

The Gujarat unit of AAP, however, claimed that Italia's photo was altered by the BJP using AI tools. *—PTI*

>>>*More on Page 4*

U'khand passes bill to replace Madrasa Act

DEHRADUN, 20 AUG

The Uttarakhand Assembly on Wednesday passed the Minority Education Bill, 2025 paving the way for extending minority status benefits to institutions run by the Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, and Parsi communities, besides Muslims, in the state.

Once implemented, the Uttarakhand Madrasa Education Board Act, 2016, and the Uttarakhand Non-Government Arabic and Persian Madrasa Recognition Rules, 2019, will stand repealed, effective 1 July 2026.

In a social media post, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said, "Today (on Wednesday), the 'Uttarakhand Minority Education Bill-2025' was passed in the Assembly. Till now, the recognition of minority institutions was limited only to the Muslim community." He said that problems like irregularities in the distribution of central scholarships and mid-day meals and lack of transparency in management were also coming to the fore in the Madrasa education system for years.

Dhami said that with the implementation of this bill, the Madrasa Education Board Act 2016 and the Non-Government Arabic and Persian Madrasa Recognition Rules 2019 will expire on 1 July 2026. *—PTI*

K'taka mulls spl quota in education for orphaned kids

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

The Karnataka government is considering creating a "special category" for orphaned children to provide them with reservation in education, Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar said on Wednesday during the State Assembly. "They will be considered under a special category. They cannot be brought under SC/ST as that has to be decided by the Central government. So, the State will do whatever is possible within its powers.... A separate category will be created," she said. Hebbalkar said the move would be on the lines of the reservation provided to persons with disabilities. She added that her department had earlier requested the Social Welfare Department to include orphaned children under SC, ST or Backward Classes, but the proposal was turned down. *—Salar News with Agencies*

—>>>*More on Page 2*

FLOOD ALERT ON

1 dead as incessant rains wreak havoc across Karnataka

BELAGAVI, 20 AUG

Incessant rains battered Karnataka on Wednesday, leading to crop damage, road disruption and evacuations. One rain-related fatalities was reported in Belagavi.

Vamanrao Bapu Pawar, 75, a resident of Ramdurg, died when the roof of his ancestral home collapsed around 4am due to five days of continuous rainfall. "His house had become completely soaked," said PSI Ramdurg Savita Munyal.

All six major rivers in Belagavi have overflowed, breaching their banks. The Krishna River, swollen by 1.5 lakh cusecs of inflow from Maharashtra, widened to 2 km in places, inundating the tallest Kudachi bridge in Raibag and severing connectivity to Bagalkot and Maharashtra. The Sheelhalli bridge was also submerged following the release of 1.6 lakh cusecs from the Narayanpur reservoir, placing several villages under flood threat. Alamatti reservoir in Vijaypura, now only 4 tmcft short of full capacity, released 2 lakh cusecs to Narayanpur to manage incoming water expected by 22 August. In Gokak, around 300 families from Uppar Galli, Kumbhar Galli and low-lying areas were evacuated after the Ghataprabha River overflowed, submerging homes under 4 feet of water. *—Salar News*

>>>*More on Page 2*

The outflow from the reservoir has been increased to 80,000 cusecs in view of the heavy rains in its catchment areas **PHOTO: PTI**

Student's burnt body found in Chitradurga

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

A partially burnt body of a 20-year-old woman student was found in Chitradurga district two days after she went missing. Police suspect that she was raped and murdered. The woman, Varshitha, a second-year BA student at Government Women's First Grade College, had left her hostel on 14 August and did not return. Her phone was switched off, and she could not be traced. Her parents, Tippeswamy and Jyothi, were about to lodge a missing complaint when they found out about the burnt body. Authorities have registered a murder case and launched an intensive investigation to identify the victim and bring the perpetrators to justice —*Salar News*

To guard labour rights: CM launches HMKP website

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday inaugurated the official website of Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (HMKP) and launched its IT Workers Wing to safeguard labour rights in the country's fast-growing technology sector. The programme, held at Kondajji Basappa Auditorium to mark the 92nd birth anniversary of veteran trade unionist Michael Fernandes, drew over 400 participants. Retired Chief Justice MN Venkatachaliah was Chief Guest, while Labour Minister Santosh Lad chaired the session. Siddaramaiah hailed Fernandes as "one of the last great stalwarts of India's workers' struggle." The event also honoured Michael Fernandes and his wife, social worker Donna Fernandes.—*Salar News*

Dharmasthala activist appears before cops

SHIVAMOGGA, 20 AUG

Activist Mahesh Shetty Timarody, who has been vocal in recent allegations of multiple killings and burials in Dharmasthala, appeared before Belthangady police on Wednesday in connection with several cases registered against him, police said. Timarody, along with Girish Mattannanavar and 16 others, had been summoned in cases relating to "unlawful assembly, assault on media persons, and derogatory remarks against the press." Timarody has been at the forefront of the Dharmasthala mass burial campaign. Without naming Timarody, Meanwhile, one more person has come forwards regarding an alleged disappearance of medical student more than two decades ago. —*PTI*

NDA sweeps Kolar Pattana Panchayat elections

KOLAR, 20 AUG

TIn the first ever elections to the newly formed Pattana Panchayat of Vemagal and Kurugal in Kolar district, the NDA has won ten of the seventeen seats while the Congress won six. An Independent candidate bagged one seat. The elections were held on the 17th Aug and the counting began on 20 Aug. Former Zilla Panchayat president CS Venkatesh, who hails from Vemagal, won. Prominent Congress leaders, including District-in-charge Minister Byrathi Suresh and Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda had campaigned for their party candidates, but failed to sway their voters. On the other hand, former Lok Sabha member S Muniswamy, former Minister Vatthur Prakash campaigned for the NDA candidates. Vemagal and Kurugal which were part of the Gram Panchayat until recently. —*Salar News*

Flood threats loom with no end to rains

Reservoirs near full capacity with rain forecasted to continue for several more days

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

Heavy rains continued to lash multiple districts across Karnataka, including Dharwad, Gadag, Davangere, Haveri, and Uttara Kannada, damaging houses and farmlands. Authorities have shifted residents in vulnerable areas to relief centres as a precaution.

The Sheelhalli–Hanchinal bridge remains submerged, cutting off road access to several riverbank villages such as Kaddaragaddi, Yarigodi, and Hanchinal. Villagers now face a 45-kilometre detour via Jaladurga to reach their taluk headquarters. Despite warnings, videos surfaced showing people washing bikes on the flooded Sheelhalli bridge, risking safety near the swollen Krishna River, which remains above the danger mark.

Heavy rainfall in Maharashtra's Western Ghats has caused large volumes of water to flow into the Krishna and Bhima rivers, raising flood concerns along their banks. The Basavasagar dam has opened all 30 of its gates, while the Gurusanagi Barrage in Yadgir district has lifted 17 gates to manage inflows. In Belagavi, the Malaprabha river basin also faced heavy rains. A video showed a biker narrowly escaping after being swept off a flooded bridge, despite locals' warnings against attempting the risky crossing. In Bidar, water entered the sanctum of the Anantha Padmanabha temple. BJP MLA Sharanu Salagar highlighted the devastating impact on farmers, with over 1.21 lakh hectares of crops, including toor dal, black gram, and soybean, destroyed. Salagar called for Rs 25,000 relief for affected farmers, urging the formation of a committee to assess losses and expedite compensation.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts continued widespread rainfall across Karnataka over the next week, with heavy showers expected in coastal and northern interior regions. Coastal areas will see rain until 25 August, with thunderstorms and gusty winds predicted in parts of the north on 26 August.

Several major reservoirs are nearing full capacity, including Almatti (123.08 TMC), Tungabhadra (76.91 TMC), KRS (47.73 TMC), and Narayanapura (33.31 TMC), raising concerns about potential flooding downstream. —*PTI*

The Lolasur bridge, on outskirts of Gokak town in Belagavi, was completely inundated by an overflowing Ghataprabha river, on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

FARMERS DEMAND RESPECT

Karnataka Sugar Workers Federation protest against the State government's 'anti-labour' attitude; Members of Karnataka State Farmers Association demand an investigation into the alleged corruption in Atal Land and Water Project (Atal Bhu Jal Yojana), at Freedom Park, in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD**

HC calls State's ban on bike taxis 'unconstitutional' and 'untenable'

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday came down on the State government's ban on bike taxis, calling its arguments against the service "thin" and "legally untenable".

Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru, heading the bench, noted that bike taxis are permitted in at least 13 states across the country and are a lawful and essential mode of urban transport.

He observed that such services are not a luxury but a necessity.

The division bench questioned the government over its decision to impose a "de facto prohibition" on the bike taxi business, observing that a legitimate trade cannot be banned outright.

Rejecting the government's stance that the Motor Vehicles Act prohibits bike taxis, the court asked the government to reconsider its ban as there were "lives at stake".

"A mere lack of regulation cannot be the basis for a blanket ban that deprives thousands of their right to work under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution," the Chief Justice remarked.

The court also asked the Advocate General (AG) to ensure that no coercive or punitive action is taken against bike taxi operators in the interim.

The AG said that the issue of framing a policy for bike taxis would be taken up at the "highest level" of the government.

"A blanket prohibition is Unconstitutional since bike taxis are a legitimate business. In the absence of regulations, the business cannot be treated as illegal and should be allowed," the bench remarked.

The matter has been posted for hearing on 22 September.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

ASSEMBLY SESSION

Accepted modified internal reservation report: CM

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said the State government, in its Cabinet meeting, accepted Justice HN Nagamohan Das's recommendations on internal reservation to the Scheduled Castes (SC) with certain modifications.

Siddaramaiah told the Assembly that as soon as the internal reservation order is issued, recruitment processes will commence, and a one-time relaxation of the age limit will be provided.

"We have also decided to withdraw cases filed against internal reservation activists," he said.

Siddaramaiah said the Cabinet noted that the Commission had grouped 'Paraya', 'Mogera' and other 'Right-Hand castes' among SCs together with the 'Left-Hand castes'.

"We decided to classify these communities with the Right-Hand group and provide them six per cent reservation," he said.

He noted that Justice Nagamohan Das recommended four per cent reservation for the 'Touchables' group and also identified 59 castes with a population of 5,22,099 as Category-A, suggesting one per cent reservation for them. For certain technical reasons, these two groups will be combined and given five per cent reservation.

DIVERTING FUNDS?

Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa told the Assembly that he would invoke penal provisions against departments that fail to provide data on beneficiaries as he came under fire from Opposition parties over alleged diversion of SC/ST funds to fuel the Congress' guarantee scheme.

The minister said all departments have been asked to provide details of SC/ST beneficiaries to ensure proper utilisation of funds. —*PTI*

The government will constitute a Permanent Scheduled Castes Commission to periodically study intra-caste dynamics and submit periodic reports

Rehab workers' honorarium hiked by Rs 1K

Women and Child Development Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar informed the Assembly that the State government has increased the monthly honorarium of rehabilitation workers under various schemes. She said the monthly honorarium of rural and urban rehabilitation workers has been raised from Rs 9,000 to Rs 10,000, while the pay of multipurpose rehabilitation workers has been increased from Rs 15,000 to Rs 16,000. Hebbalkar added that rules do not permit the regularisation of rehabilitation workers appointed under the Rural Rehabilitation Scheme, something they have protested for.

—*Salar News*

Govt's reservation scheme is a tribute to D Devaraj Urs: DKS

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

DyCM DK Shivakumar & AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan pay tribute to former PM Rajiv Gandhi and former CM D Devaraj Urs on their birth anniversaries, in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Paying tributes to former State chief minister D Devaraj Urs and former prime minister Raji Gandhi on their birth anniversaries, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that the current Congress government's internal reservation Bill was a tribute to Karnataka's longest serving CM.

Speaking at the KPCC office, he said, "It is 25 years since the Justice Sadashiv Commission was formed. Our government has given a shape to the internal reservation after detailed deliberations. The left and the right of the Scheduled castes have agreed to the arrangement. We have given justice to everyone."

"Congress is a party which has been working towards social justice from the days of Devaraj Urs," he said.

Shivakumar said Urs nurtured young leaders.

"He gave tickets to TB Jayachandra and H Vishwanath and he made Mallikarjun Kharge a minister," he recalled.

DyCM also praised the land reforms passed under Urs.

"We still talk about (it) decades after it was done. It was the contribution of Indira Gandhi and Devaraj Urs. "

LEGAL BANKS IN EVERY CONSTITUENCY

Shivakumar said that the State would set up legal banks in every constituency of the State in the next six months.

"During a recent workshop on Constitution in New Delhi, Rahul Gandhi called for setting up legal banks in each constituency to protect voters' rights. I have given instructions to the head of our legal cell regarding this," he added. —*Salar News*

BJP allege 'police trouble' during Hindu festivals along coastal belt

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

BJP MLAs, particularly from the coastal districts, on Wednesday alleged in the Assembly that police were causing "trouble" during Hindu festivals and traditional events by citing violations of rules relating to sound systems and timings. They urged the government to issue directions to officials to prevent such "disruptions" ahead of Ganeshotsava and Navaratri celebrations.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, BJP MLA Vedavyas Kamath claimed that during the recent Janmashtami in Dakshina Kannada, police seized sound systems at multiple locations, citing noise levels above 40–50 decibels, and filed cases against both organisers and equipment owners.

According to police, no religious events can be held after 10pm, citing government and court orders. The MLA alleged that after Congress government came to power, "issues have arisen over holding Hindu religious events."

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said events such as Kola, Urs at dargahs, and Christmas celebrations are also held at night in coastal districts. "During Ganeshotsava, idols are installed in streets across the State. The government should ensure that no problems are caused," he said.

Speaker UT Khader remarked, "There is tradition on one side and law on the other. Most religious events, irrespective of caste or religion, are held at night in Dakshina Kannada. We must find a solution." —*PTI*

BEYOND SC/ST

Govt mulls spl reservation for orphaned kids

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

PHOTO: PTI

The State government is considering creating a "special category" for orphaned children to provide them with reservation in education, Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar said on Wednesday.

Responding to a question by Congress MLA Nayana Motamma during Question Hour in the Assembly, Hebbalkar said the move would be on the lines of the reservation provided to persons with disabilities.

"They will be considered under a special category. They cannot be brought under SC/ST as that has to be decided by the Central government. So, the State will do whatever is possible within its powers," she said.

Speaker UT Khader asked the Hebbalkar and Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa to hold discussions with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to arrive at a solution and decide on recommendations to be sent to the Centre.

Hebbalkar said there are 712 government, aided and unaided orphanages or child care institutions in the state, housing 17,049 children—9,175 boys and 7,874 girls. She said former Backward Classes Commission chairman Jayaprakash Hegde had recommended that these children be included under Category-1 of OBCs.

Minister for Textiles Shivanand S Patil also urged the Mahadevappa to consider special privileges for them as they cannot identify their caste or creed. —*Salar News with Agencies*

C'ballapur cops launch 24/7 WhatsApp Chatbot

C'BALLAPUR, 20 AUG

The Chikkaballapur District Police have launched "Namma Cop 24x7", a dedicated WhatsApp chatbot app designed to bring police services to the door steps of the people of the district and make the department more people friendly.

The app aims to being the department closer to citizens in a simple, quick, and reliable manner and will provide all the needy guidance and assistance to the people of the district by the click of the button on their mobile phones said Kushak Chouske, Superintendent of Police, Chikkaballapur.

He said the people who are in need of help or protection from the department can send in their request on the designated WhatsApp number of the department.

The new app will also provide guidance to the people in getting ambulance and fire services and will assist with legal modalities in case of falling prey to cyber criminals, he pointed out. The facility will help the common man with legal awareness in simple terms and will provide information about passport verification, police verification and help them get NOC certificates.

The facility available in four languages including Kannada, English, Hindi and Telugu. —*Salar News*

THE 'VOTE THEFT' CONUNDRUM

Opposition accuses EC of helping BJP steal votes during elections

ANUSHREE CHAKRABORTY & AMINA AFAQ

The country is witnessing a political showdown like never before.

It started on 7 August when Congress leader Rahul Gandhi dropped a "bomb" and accused the Election Commission of India of helping the BJP steal votes during the 2024 Parliamentary elections.

Gandhi cited poll data of Mahadevapura in Bengaluru Central parliamentary constituency, and claimed that there were at least 1 lakh manipulated entries. These included duplicate voters, invalid addresses, and numerous voters at a single location.

He said Congress lost at least 48 seats in the 2024 LS polls due to this "theft". Congress won 99 of the 543 seats while BJP bagged 240.

However, this is not the Congress' fight alone. Gandhi found support in hundreds of Opposition lawmakers, and they announced a rally in Bihar against the EC, accusing it of not upholding the "one person, one vote" principle of a democracy.

Incidentally, EC held a press conference on 17 August, the same day as the rally and aggressively accused the Opposition of making baseless allegations. Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar was the man of the hour (though the presser was for 85 minutes) and went through great effort to counter the Opposition's claims.

However, it turns out that many of Kumar's claims crumble under scrutiny. **Salar News** cuts through the noise to point out some of the discrepancies.

40,009
VOTES WERE STOLEN IN THE MAHADEVAPURA SEAT VIA FAKE AND INVALID ADDRESSES, AND 11,965 THROUGH DUPLICATE VOTERS, CLAIMS RAGA

DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA

IS DEFLECT AND DENY EC's PLAN?

RAGA GETS ULTIMATUM, BJP'S THAKUR GOES SCOT-FREE

EC'S NARRATIVE

The CEC has given Rahul Gandhi seven days to submit an affidavit regarding his allegations, failing which he must apologise to the nation.

THE GOOGLY

However, CEC did not make the same demand of NDA leaders such as Anurag Thakur. Anurag had claimed voter theft in 5 Lok Sabha seats and 1 Assembly segment — including Wayanad and Raebareli.

DOES RAGA REALLY NEED TO FILE AN AFFIDAVIT?

EC'S NARRATIVE

The CEC has asked Gandhi to sign an affidavit under Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, within seven days, warning that without it, his claims would be considered baseless.

THE GOOGLY

However, former CEC OP Rawat has called this demand unnecessary, pointing out that Rule 20(3)(b), which requires claims and objections to be submitted on oath — applies only during an electoral roll revision. This means that outside of formal revision periods, the registration officer is not obligated to demand an oath or sworn affidavit, and any inquiry into fraudulent or multiple entries can be conducted under other relevant provisions.

EC'S LOGIC BEHIND NOT PROBING 'VOTE THEFT'

EC'S NARRATIVE

This is what CEC said, "How can we summon 1.5 lakh voters to the SDM office, make them wait, and accuse them of being fake voters? Won't the voters ask, 'What proof do you have?'"

THE GOOGLY

One wonders why can't the EC direct Booth Level Officers (BLOs) or SDM officers to conduct door-to-door verification instead of summoning 1.5 lakh people? Why wasn't this verification done before the polls?
Also, if the EC was able to visit the homes of 8 crore people in Bihar just a few months before the elections, then why can't a similar action be taken for just 1.5 lakh voters?

CAN'T EC PROBE ALLEGATIONS WITHOUT AFFIDAVIT?

According to Section 22 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has the authority to delete or modify any entry in the electoral roll either on an application or on his own motion.
This means that the EC has the power to take suo motu cognisance of allegations or irregularities in the voter list. So, instead of asking Rahul Gandhi to submit a signed certificate or affidavit, why does the EC — an institution responsible for conducting free and fair elections — not act on its own?
Just as any authority must act when a potential crime is reported, the EC too has a responsibility to proactively probe the matter, rather than shifting the burden entirely onto the complainant.

CURIOUS CASE OF 'HOUSE NO. 0'

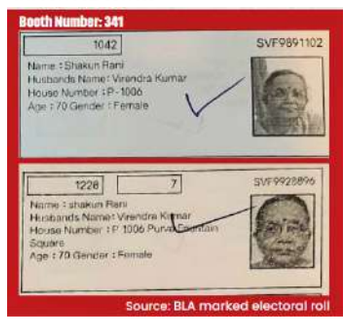
EC'S NARRATIVE

Gandhi had flagged 30,000 illegal addresses with "House number 0", "00", "000", "-" and "#". EC said the 'House number zero' is assigned to those houses, especially in rural areas, which do not have designated numbers.

THE GOOGLY

However, when fact-checked by various organisations, it was found that the voters who had house No. zero did not exist.

THE CCTV FOOTAGE CONUNDRUM



EC'S NARRATIVE

The Opposition demanded CCTV footage from polling booths as the EC had claimed that lakhs of voters turned up in the final hours of polling in Karnataka. Gandhi alleged that a woman named Shakun Rani had voted twice, as her name appeared twice on the electoral list. Opposition says the only way to verify this is by checking CCTV footage. Opposition also claims that EC has destroyed the footages to cover up.

THE GOOGLY

EC's response? Releasing such footage will violate the modesty of "mothers and sisters".

> **Did you take permission of the women before you placed those CCTVs? Polling booth is not a dress changing room. We are not interested in your convenient excuses... we need transparency**
>
> —Prakash Raj, activist

1 VOTER, MANY VOTES. BUT WHO WILL PROVE IT?

EC'S NARRATIVE

CEC said that some people have multiple voter identity cards due to migration. He also added that just because someone has multiple voter IDs, they cannot cast more than one vote, and asked Opposition to prove if this has happened.

THE GOOGLY

However, holding more than one voter ID is a crime. So how does EC plan to check this? Also, how does the EC expect parties to prove if such people voted more than once? This requires auditing, which only EC has access to it.

EC MISTAKEN, OPPN HAS BEEN FLAGGING DISCREPANCIES

EC'S NARRATIVE

CEC accused the Opposition parties of not flagging voter discrepancies even though the law allows parties to challenge the election results 45 days after they are declared.

THE GOOGLY

However, multiple parties have raised objections after Assembly elections such as Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi, but nothing was done. In fact, Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi also moved the Bombay HC alleging voting irregularities in the Maharashtra elections, but it was dismissed. HC said he was "wasting the court's time". Congress wrote a letter to EC on 29 November, 2024, flagging voter discrepancies in Maharashtra, but no action was taken.

DID EC WRONGLY CITE SC ORDER?

EC'S NARRATIVE

On 8 Aug, the EC replaced digital draft voter lists in Bihar with scanned image versions on its official website — just a day after Rahul's press conference. Digital draft lists are easier to analyse for errors and large-scale patterns, while scanned images make such analysis significantly harder. The reason? Citing a 2019 Supreme Court judgment, CEC claimed that the voter list in a machine-readable format cannot be shared with political parties as it would compromise voter privacy.

THE GOOGLY

However, this interpretation misrepresents the actual SC order. Nowhere does the SC prohibit the sharing of a machine-readable format.
The 2019 judgment states:
"ECI has directed its field-level functionaries to put only the 'Image PDF' of the electoral roll in the public domain... It may be added that if the petitioner so wants, he can always convert it into searchable mode which, of course, would require him to put his own efforts."
Additionally, contrary to the EC's implication, changes cannot be made to machine-readable lists. They merely allow for basic functions such as using the "Ctrl + F" command to search for names, addresses, or EPIC numbers.

CEC SAYS NO ONE FILED PLAINT, AKHILESH SAYS 'I DID'

EC'S NARRATIVE

The CEC stated that no political party had filed a complaint about voter theft with an affidavit, and that there was no "voter chori" in the country.

THE GOOGLY

However, Akhilesh Yadav called out the CEC for "brazenly lying". In 2022, Yadav's Samajwadi Party had submitted a signed affidavit alleging that 18,000 voters had been illegally deleted in Uttar Pradesh. The EC had even issued an acknowledgment receipt. Yadav shared a copy of the receipt on X too. No action was taken in this case either.

THE WALKING DEAD VOTERS

EC'S NARRATIVE

When questioned about the Bihar SIR draft roll declaring over 22 lakh people dead in just six months, the CEC claimed that these deaths occurred over the past 20 years but were only now recorded, as earlier revisions didn't involve door-to-door verification.

THE GOOGLY

However, the Opposition called this claim ludicrous, arguing that if the voter list used in the last Lok Sabha polls was inaccurate, the House should be dissolved and EC officials, including CEC, held accountable. They questioned how this happened, though revisions of rolls took place every year.

EC SAYS ITS NUMBERS ARE 'FAKE'

EC'S NARRATIVE

EC claimed that the numbers presented by Rahul Gandhi were not theirs, though the voter list was provided by the EC. CEC added Gandhi's analysis was wrong too.

THE GOOGLY

The Opposition is asking if the EC is saying that its own data is inaccurate.

EC REJECTS ITS OWN GUIDELINE ON INTENSIVE REVISION

EC'S NARRATIVE

In the past, EC has said that it will not conduct an intensive revision of voters in an election year. In 2005, intensive revisions in Arunachal and Maharashtra were stopped and EC refused to allow it in the entire nation.

THE GOOGLY

So, why is the EC breaking away from its own guideline? EC is hastily conducting SIR in Bihar just 3 months before Assembly elections, that too amid floods. When asked by a scribe, the CEC said that electoral roles should be revised before elections, not after.

OPPN SAYS EC LYING ABOUT BIHAR SIR

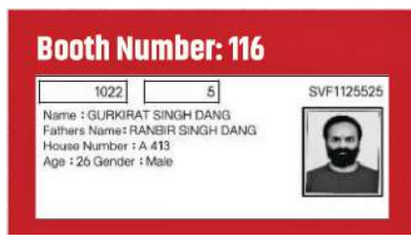
EC'S NARRATIVE

CEC claimed that the EC had carried out a Bihar SIR drive in 2003 in a short span of time just like it is doing this year.

THE GOOGLY

Interestingly, Bihar Opposition parties claimed that in 2003, the EC took a year to complete this exercise.

SAME NAME, FINE. BUT THE SAME DAD'S NAME?

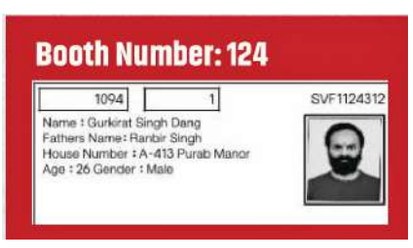


EC'S NARRATIVE

On multiple voters with the same name, CEC cited Piyush Goyal as an example and said India has many people named Piyush.

THE GOOGLY

However, the "proof" shown by Gandhi shows that people with the same name also have the same father's name. For example, Gurkirat Singh Dang appears four times in the voter list across booths 116, 124, 125, and 126, but all entries list the father's name as "Ranbir Singh".



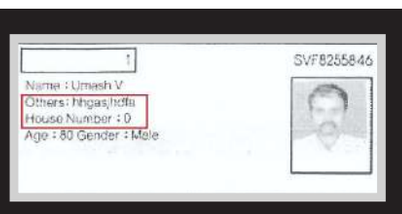
DID BLOs FORGE SIGNATURES IN BIHAR?

Journalist Ajit Anjum, covering the Bihar SIR, released a video from Phulwari Assembly constituency in Patna showing Booth Level Officers (BLOs) allegedly forging signatures on voter forms.
The Patna district administration dismissed the claims as misleading, stating the BLOs were updating records of deceased or shifted voters by marking "Death" or "Shifted" with their own signatures.

However, Alt News analysed Anjum's video and found: a male BLO was signing as Shanti Devi, and a female BLO as Chandra Prakash Sah. Anjum also found voter forms lacked addresses, Aadhaar, or EPIC numbers, raising concerns over fake entries. Despite this, rather than launching an inquiry, authorities filed an FIR against Anjum.

QUESTIONS EC DID NOT ANSWER

- How many voters were added during SIR (25 June-25 July) in Bihar?
- If it is true that a leader is spreading falsehoods, don't you have any authority to take action against them?
- After Rahul's press conference, many issues are reported from different states, including Kerala. Will you initiate an inquiry? CEC replied with "Next".
- How did the number of voters increase by 5 crore in



- How come some voters had their address and father names as "dfoigoidf"?

INVITATION TO FILE OBJECTIONS

EC said all eligible electors left out of Bihar's draft electoral roll published on 1 August, 2025, can file their claim in Form 6, along with a copy of their Aadhaar card, before 1 September. Similarly, if any ineligible elector has been included in the draft roll, any aggrieved elector of that assembly constituency can file objection in Form 7 within the same deadline.

PHOTO: PTI

Chhattisgarh cabinet expanded; 3 MLAs take oath

RAIPUR, 20 AUG

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expanded his cabinet on Wednesday, inducting three first-time BJP MLAs Rajesh Agrawal, Guru Khushwant Saheb and Gajendra Yadav raising its strength to 14, the highest in the state's history under the constitutional limit. Governor Ramen Deka administered the oath at Raj Bhavan. Yadav will handle school education, law and cottage industries; Saheb gets skill development, technical education, employment and SC development; Agrawal oversees tourism, culture and religious trusts. The expansion ensures a caste and regional balance: seven OBCs, three ST, two SCs and two from general category, with Laxmi Rajwade as sole woman minister. BJP aims to strengthen its social and political base.—*PTI*

Ex-YSRCP minister released on bail in illegal mining

NELLORE, 20 AUG

YSRCP leader and former minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy was released on Wednesday after spending 86 days in jail over an alleged illegal quartz mining case. Reddy was arrested by Andhra Pradesh police on the night of 25–26 May from the outskirts of Bengaluru. Although the High Court granted him bail on 18 August, procedural delays postponed his release. Police allege Reddy was involved in illegal mining, unauthorised use of explosives, and abusing tribal people with caste-based slurs. He faces charges under several laws, including the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, the Explosive Substances Act, the Mines and Minerals Act, and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. —*PTI*

Cong flag hoisted at Kerala CPI(M) office on I-Day

KOCHI, 20 AUG

In a major embarrassment, a CPI(M) branch committee in Eloor, Kerala, accidentally hoisted Congress party flag instead of Indian national flag during Independence Day celebrations. Sources said, an elderly local leader, who also serves as an office-bearer of the Left party's Senior Citizens' Forum, mistakenly believed the Congress flag was the tricolour. The error went unnoticed until after the hoisting ceremony, when a participant pointed it out. The Congress flag remained up for about 10 minutes before being swiftly replaced. Despite photos and videos going viral on social media, a senior CPI(M) district leader confirmed it was an honest mistake. —*PTI*

M'rashtra voter data row: Sanjay Kumar booked

NAGPUR, 20 AUG

Nagpur district police on Wednesday registered an FIR against psephologist Sanjay Kumar on charges of "false statement in connection with an election" after he alleged a rise in voter numbers in two assembly segments in Maharashtra polls compared to the 2024 general elections. Kumar's post had claimed a significant increase in voter numbers in two assembly seats compared to the 2024 general elections, which were held nearly six months apart. He later deleted it on Tuesday and in another post, apologised for posting "erroneous data" on the microblogging platform. An FIR was registered against Kumar on a complaint lodged by the tehsildar of Ramtek, a senior police officer told PTI. He was booked under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita.—*PTI*

Modi turning India into dictatorship: Oppn

As bill in LS seeks sacking of arrested ministers, Oppn says BJP wants to topple state govts

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Opposition parties strongly opposed the bill that provided for the removal of the prime minister and chief ministers arrested on criminal charges, claiming that the bills undermine the very foundation of democracy.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday tabled three key bills in the Lok Sabha, including the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi strongly attacked statating that if the bills will take the country back to medieval times when the king could just remove anybody at will. It created a climate of fear by threatening to removal elected leaders on arbitrary grounds

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday slammed the new bill as "draconian" and "undemocratic". She called them anti-democracy and against Constitution.

Congress MP KC Venugopal speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Monsoon session of Parliament, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Left parties said the new bills are a direct "assault" on democracy and the federal framework, and vowed to oppose it "tooth and nail".

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee the bill alleging that it was a step "more than a super-Emergency" and will "finish" independence of the country's judiciary.

The bill is against the basic principles of Indian laws, and the opposition will strongly protest against this, Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said the bills were aimed at terrorising the governments led by opposition parties.

The ruling National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir said some provisions of the three bills were "draconian", and expressed the hope that government will address the concerns of the opposition.

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee alleged that the Centre is interested only in amassing power and control without accountability by tabling such bills.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin described the bills as a "Black Bill" to foist cases against political opponents in power and remove them.

This was how dictatorships begin; "steal votes, silence rivals and crush states," he said.

Congress MP KC Venugopal questioned Amit Shah that when he was the home minister of Gujarat and faced arrest, did he consider taking moral responsibility and resigning.

Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi said that the best way to destabilise opposition is to unleash biased central agencies to arrest opposition CMs.

AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi said the bill allows executive agencies a free run by becoming the judge, jury and executioner based on flimsy allegations and suspicion.

Imagine this. Last year, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal spent six months in jail before being granted bail in the liquor policy case. He ran the government from jail.

It was only after he got bail that he stepped down.

If the new bills were in place, Kejriwal would have been automatically removed as chief minister on the 31st day of his custody after arrest. —*PTI*

> **On the face of it, it is difficult to say it has any problem, but obviously if anyone does something wrong they should not be a minister anyway. I don't know if there is any other motive.**
>
> -Shashi Tharoor, Congress leader

Online money games to attract 3 yrs jail, ₹1 cr fine

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

A new bill proposes stringent penalties for engaging in online money games in India, including up to three years' imprisonment and fines reaching 1 crore for facilitating financial transactions related to such games. Repeat offenders could face up to five years in jail and penalties as high as 2 crore, with offences made cognisable and non-bailable under key sections.

The legislation seeks a blanket ban on all online betting and gambling, covering platforms offering fantasy sports, poker, rummy, card games, and lotteries. It prohibits offering, operating, facilitating, advertising, promoting, or participating in online money games—defined as games where users deposit money expecting financial gain—whether based on skill, chance, or both.

Top cricketers and film stars endorsing platforms like Dream11, Games24x7, and Mobile Premier League have contributed to rising popularity among youth. However, the government cites growing concerns over addiction, financial loss, suicides, fraud, money laundering, and national security risks.

Advertising of money games could result in up to two years' imprisonment or 50 lakh in fines, while banks and payment platforms will be barred from processing transactions related to such games.

The bill also proposes the establishment of a regulatory authority for online gaming to support and oversee e-sports, educational platforms, and social games, while aligning digital laws with existing physical-world gambling restrictions. E-sports will be recognised as a legitimate sport, with guidelines set by the Ministry of Sports. Meanwhile, MeitY and MIB will support games promoting education, culture, and social development. —*PTI*

E-sports will be recognised as a legitimate sport, with guidelines set by the Ministry of Sports PHOTO: FREEPIK

Parl passes Bill to establish 22nd IIM in Guwahati

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The country's 22nd Indian Institute of Management (IIM) is set to be established in Guwahati with an investment of Rs 555 crore, as Parliament cleared a Bill in this regard on Wednesday, with Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan saying the new institution will start admitting students from the current academic year itself.

The Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill, 2025 was passed by the Rajya Sabha with a voice vote even as the Opposition staged a walkout soon after the bill was introduced. The bill to set up an IIM in Guwahati will go for Presidential assent after its passage in both Houses of Parliament. Introducing the bill in the Rajya Sabha, Pradhan said setting up of IIM-Guwahati, with a central outlay of Rs 555 crore, will contribute towards making India the third largest economy in the world. Today the number of students in 2024-25 is 9,800. —*PTI*

Sanctions on India to end Russia-Ukraine war: WH

NEW YORK, 20 AUG

US President Donald Trump has announced steep new tariffs on India in an effort to increase pressure on Russia and push for an end to the ongoing war in Ukraine. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump had imposed tariffs totalling 50 per cent on Indian goods, including an additional 25 per cent specifically linked to New Delhi's continued purchases of Russian oil. The new measures will take effect from 27 August, 2025.

Speaking at a press briefing on Tuesday, Leavitt stated that the move forms part of the administration's broader strategy to isolate Moscow and cut off funding for its military campaign. "The President has put tremendous public pressure on this issue and made it clear he wants the war to end as quickly as possible," she said.

The decision follows remarks from US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who recently accused India of "profiteering" by reselling Russian crude at higher prices, undermining global sanctions against Moscow.

India has strongly condemned the tariffs, calling them "unjustified and unreasonable". In a statement, New Delhi defended its energy imports, stressing that, like any major economy, it will take "all necessary measures" to safeguard its national interests and economic security. —*PTI*

Jobs scam: Court orders summons against WB Min

KOLKATA, 20 AUG

A special court here on Wednesday directed that summons be issued against West Bengal Correctional Administration Minister Chandranath Sinha within 15 days in connection with an Enforcement Directorate (ED) case relating to alleged irregularities in primary school job recruitment.

The judge directed Sinha to appear before the court, when the matter will be taken up for hearing again. ED was recently granted assent by the West Bengal governor to prosecute Sinha in connection with the case filed against him in relation to alleged irregularities in recruitment in state-run and aided primary schools.

The governor's assent, which paves the way for the prosecution of Sinha, was presented before court during day.— *PTI*

NDA's Radhakrishnan files nomination for VP poll

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, 20 AUG

NDA candidate CP Radhakrishnan on Wednesday filed his nomination papers for the vice presidential election in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders.

Modi handed over four sets of nomination papers to Rajya Sabha Secretary General PC Mody, who is the returning officer for the vice presidential election.

PM Narendra Modi flanked by Maharashtra Guv and NDA's VP candidate CP Radhakrishnan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh and others in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Additionally, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut claimed that leaders of NDA were reaching out to Opposition parties for VP election because ruling alliance is not confident about its majority. —*PTI*

Cabinet reshuffle in Goa as two ministers quit

PANAJI, 20 AUG

BJP government in Goa is set for a reshuffle with Goa's minister for Environment, Captain of Ports, Law and Judiciary and Legislative Affairs Aleixo Sequeira resigning on Wednesday and veteran leader Digambar Kamat likely to be inducted in the cabinet along with current Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar.

Tawadkar said he would resign as Speaker on Thursday morning.

Minutes later Sequeira resignation news, Tawadkar said he would resign, and added that two ministers would be sworn in on Thursday noon without disclosing who the second minister would be.

BJP sources confirmed that Margao MLA and former chief minister Digambar Kamat would be sworn in along with Tawadkar. Kamat indirectly confirmed the news as he spoke to reporters.

Meanwhile, Sequeira resigned citing personal reasons. Sequeira handed over his resignation letter to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant in the afternoon.

The 68-year-old MLA from Nuvem had joined Sawant-led cabinet in November 2023, replacing Nilesh Cabral.

"I am resigning from the cabinet on personal grounds," he told reporters at government headquarters Mantralaya in Porvorim. —*PTI*

Centre to exempt life and health insurance from GST

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The Centre has proposed exempting life and health insurance policies for individuals from GST, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and convenor of insurance Group of Minister (GoM) Samrat Choudhary said on Wednesday.

Currently, health and life insurance premium attracts 18 per cent GST.

The 13-member state GoMs on insurance held a meeting on Wednesday.

Almost all states were in favour of the proposal, but they asked the GST Council to device a mechanism by which the GST rate cut benefits are passed on to the customer, said Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka.

About Rs 9,700 crore annual revenue loss is estimated on account of GST exemption to individual insurance policies, he said.

The GoM will submit its report to the GST Council, Choudhary said.

The GoM on health and life insurance was set up in September to suggest tax rates. —*PTI*

'REDDY A TOWERING FIGURE IN INDIAN JURISPRUDENCE', SAYS KHARGE

NEW DELHI, 20 AIUG

Leaders of several opposition parties on Wednesday felicitated their joint vice presidential candidate B Sudershan Reddy in the central hall of Samvidhan Sadan (old Parliament).

Introducing Reddy, a retired Supreme Court judge, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said the Opposition parties decided to field someone who has been dedicated to constitutional principles and Reddy is one such person.

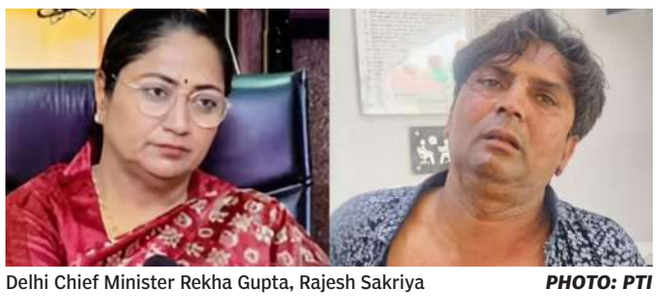
Kharge described Reddy as a "towering figure" in Indian jurisprudence and said he is renowned for his unwavering commitment to justice.

Kharge said the former judge has been a fearless champion of social, economic, and political equality, delivering landmark judgments that have strengthened the fabric of India's democracy.

Welcoming Reddy, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said there is a war going on between those who are attacking the Constitution and those who are defending it. —*PTI*

'WELL-PLANNED CONSPIRACY'

Delhi CM's attacker: A dog lover, upset by SC order



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Rajesh Sakriya PHOTO: PTI

RAJKOT, 20 AUG

Bhanuben Sakaria, mother of the man accused of attacking Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a Jan Sunvai, claimed her son is not affiliated with any political party and was in Delhi to protest the Supreme Court's order on stray dogs. "He loves dogs, cows, and birds. He was upset after the SC said all stray dogs in Delhi should be captured," she said, adding that he had recently gone to Haridwar and told her over the phone he would go to Delhi to protest.

She further claimed her son has mental health issues and occasionally turns violent.

Meanwhile, Delhi Minister Kapil Mishra labelled the assault as "not an ordinary attack", alleging the accused tried to push CM Gupta to the ground and beat her. Official sources believe it was a "well-planned conspiracy", citing CCTV footage from Gupta's residence. The footage reportedly shows the suspect conducting a recce, recording visuals, and speaking on the phone during a prior visit—at least 24 hours before attack.

Police have recovered two videos of Jan Sunvai from the accused's phone. —*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Probe 'on track' in rapper Vedan rape case: police

KOCHI, 20 AUG

Kochi City Police Commissioner Putta Vimaladitya said on Wednesday that the investigation into rape allegations against rapper Vedan is "moving in the right direction". The Kerala High Court is currently considering Vedan's anticipatory bail plea after a doctor accused him of rape under the pretext of marriage. Vimaladitya denied claims that police are favouring Vedan, stating that he is absconding and a lookout notice has been issued to prevent him leaving the country. Two additional complaints alleging sexual advances have been forwarded to the Chief Minister's Office and will be verified before deciding on further cases. The High Court directed the police not to arrest the rapper until his bail plea was reconsidered. *—PTI*

Producer slammed for AI generated film on Hanuman

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has slammed producer Vijay Subramaniam for his AI-generated movie "Chiranjeevi Hanuman- The Eternal", saying it represents a dangerous future for Hindi cinema.The 52-year-old shared the film's poster on Instagram with a note to Subramaniam, who is the founder and group CEO of talent management agency Collective Artists Network. Subramaniam has produced the project in collaboration with Vikram Malhotra of Abundantia Entertainment. "This right here is the future for the spineless and cowardly so-called artists in the Hindi Film industry. Well done Vijay Subramaniam. Shame is not enough on you. You should be in the gutter," Kashyap posted. He said all artistes should question him or leaving the agency. *—PTI*

Manipur woman given wrong injection, dies

IMPHAL, 20 AUG

The family of 52-year-old Hijam Ongbi Ibecha has accused doctors at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Imphal West of medical negligence following her death on Tuesday night. Relative's claim she was administered a wrong injection, triggering heart failure. Soon after, family members, friends and locals from Sekmai, where the deceased was from, staged a protest inside the hospital, demanding justice and the dismissal of the doctors involved. The family has refused to claim the body until action is taken. Speaking to the media, Ibecha's sister alleged that her life could have been saved with proper care. RIMS authorities have not commented, while the security has been tightened. *—PTI*

CBI to probe Haryana teacher's death post outcry

CHANDIGARH, 20 AUG

The Haryana government is going to hand over the probe into the death of a 19-year-old teacher in Bhiwani to the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) following public outrage. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said the investigation was handed over to the CBI. The government on 19 August ordered the suspension of mobile internet, bulk SMS and dongle services in Bhiwani and Charkhi Dadri districts for 48 hours. Manisha's body was found in a field in Bhiwani on 13 August after she had gone missing while on her way to enquire about admission at a nursing college.However, her father, Sanjay, rejected the finding and refused to cremate the body, demanding "justice." *—PTI*

Over 50 Delhi schools receive fresh bomb threats

Officials with dog squads investigate the school premises for bombs in Delhi on Wednesday *PHOTO: ANI*

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Around 50 schools in the national capital received bomb threats on Wednesday through e-mail, prompting police and other emergency agencies to launch a search operation, officials said.

Police sources have said that around 50 schools have received bomb threats in the capital. These include Rahul Model School and Maxfort School in Dwarka and SKV in Malviya Nagar and Andhra School in Prasad Nagar.

According to the Delhi Fire Services, information regarding bomb threats at two schools -- SKV in Malviya Nagar and Andhra School in Prasad Nagar -- was received at 7.40 am and 7.42 am, respectively.

The fresh threat comes just two days after 32 schools across the city received similar threats on 18 August, which later turned out to be hoaxes. . In July, over 45 schools and three colleges received similar bomb threat via emails, while in May 2024, nearly 300 schools were targeted in a mass mail, which turned out to be a hoax.

After receiving the e-mails, several schools alerted authorities through the course of the morning. The fire department, the bomb disposal squads and local police swung in to action, conducting search-and-cordon operations in these schools. Students were either shifted to playgrounds or sent home during the operations. .

According to police officials tracking down senders of such e-mails remained a challenge as culprits often hid their identities by using global email service providers and foreign domains that refuse to cooperate with Indian agencies, darknet platforms or proxy servers and VPNs.

Authorities claimed that every threat was dealt with utmost seriousness.

"We cannot put lives at risk even if a threat is revealed as a hoax. Every email is investigated until declared otherwise," an officer said. *—Agencies*

Guv can't send bills meant for 2nd review to Prez: SC

SC asks whether harmony between guv, state govt exists

- President Droupadi Murmu exercised powers to know from the top court whether judicial orders could impose timelines for the exercise of discretion by the president while dealing such Bills. The SC said the president should decide on bills within three months.

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said Governor cannot send bills to President for consideration when presented to him for the second time after the state assembly has cleared it.

The top court made the remark while questioning the Centre over the powers of Governor when it comes to granting assent to bills.

A governor has to either assent to a bill passed by the assembly or he can withhold assent or send it for the consideration of President. He can also send back the bill to the assembly for reconsideration provided it is not a money bill.

The court's observation comes in the wake of Centre's stand that Governor can exercise his power to send the bill to President even after the assembly puts it before him for the second time. His power to withhold assent should be left open-ended.

SC questioned Centre over Governor's power *PHOTO: PTI*

He said there could be cases where Governor may first withhold, give reasons for it and return the bill for amendments to the assembly and in the second instance, Governor could later change his mind and grant assent in case the assembly makes the necessary amendments in the bill.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, sought to distinguish between the powers of Governor and President, saying the former had more powers under the Constitution.

The bench earlier asked whether the country has lived up to the expectations of the Constitution framers that there will be harmony between the governor and the state .

In May, President Droupadi Murmu exercised powers to know whether judicial orders could impose timelines for the exercise of discretion by the president while dealing with such bills.

The apex court while dealing with the powers of the governor with respect to Bills passed by the Tamil Nadu Assembly, prescribed that the president should decide on the Bills reserved for her consideration within three months from the date on which received. *—PTI*

DISPROPORTIONATE ASSETS

SC stays case against TN minister arrested by ED

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The Supreme Court has stayed the proceedings before a special court against DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Minister I Periyasamy and his family members in a Rs 2.1 crore disproportionate assets case.

The court also issued notice in the matter on 18 August.

"There shall be stay of proceedings in.. pending before the Chief Judicial Magistrate cum Special Judge for Prevention of Corruption Act Cases, Dindigul," the court said.

I Periyasamy *PHOTO: ANI*

The top court passed the order on Periyasamy's appeal challenging the Madras High Court verdict, which directed the special court to frame charges against him and his family members.

The high court passed the order on pleas filed by Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC), challenging an order discharging Periyasamy and his family members from the case.

The high court, however, rejected that order and directed the special court to conduct a day-to-day trial and complete it within six months.

Periyasamy reportedly amassed wealth to the tune of Rs 2.1 crore in his name and in the names of his wife P Suseela and sons P Sentilkumar and P Prabhu, disproportionate to his known sources of income when he was a minister. The DVAC filed the appeals before the high court in 2018. *—PTI*

RECEIVED 25% BURN INJURIES

MP student sets teacher on fire over unrequited love

BENGALURU, 20 AUG

Unrequited love has led to a class 10 student setting his teacher on fire at her residence in Narsinghpur district of Madhya Pradesh.

The accused, Suryansh Kochar, 18, was arrested on 19 August. Kochar was a student of the Utkrisht School at Narsinghpur, where the victim was posted as a lab technician and guest teacher one and a half months ago.

The accused had reportedly arrived at the teachers with a bottle of petrol. When she came out to meet him, he poured the petrol on her and set her on fire. He fled from the scene.

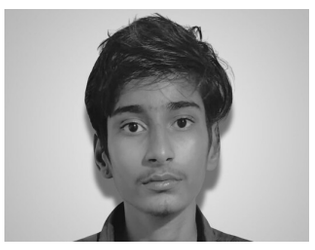
The teacher, 26, sustained 25 per cent burn injuries in the incident and was admitted in the Jabalpur Medical College for better treatment.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Sandeep Bhuria said the police are investigating into the incident that was related to a love affair.

The teacher had reportedly complained against the accused made objectionable remarks against her during the recent Independence Day celebrations in the school.

The police were trying to find the exact cause that had led to the attack. Further action would be initiated after their statements were recorded.

The two had known each other for the past two years and Kocher had developed feelings for her. *—Agencies*



- Suryansh Kochar, 18, Kochar was a student of the Utkrisht School at Narsinghpur, where the victim was posted as a lab technician and guest teacher one and a half months ago. He reportedly arrived at her house with a bottle of petrol, which he poured on her before setting her on fire.

Rains recede, Mumbai back to normal

MUMBAI, 20 AUG

Heavy rainfall has disrupted normal life across parts of India, triggering floods, rescues, and relief measures. In Mumbai, intermittent showers continued overnight, but rainfall intensity eased on Wednesday, allowing public transport to resume after a day of chaos. The Central Railway's harbour line reopened after a 15-hour suspension, while BEST bus services and other train routes returned to normal.

The IMD issued an orange alert, with rainfall expected to decrease from Thursday. Mumbai recorded over 200mm in several areas, with Vikhroli (229.5 mm) and Santacruz (209 mm) worst affected. On Tuesday, 782 monorail passengers were rescued after trains stalled due to waterlogging.

In Thane and Palghar, flooding submerged low-lying areas. A man died after falling into a water-filled quarry in Rabale, while the Runde bridge in Kalyan was closed. Authorities rescued 194 people from inundated areas in Vasai, and 5,000 poultry birds perished in Palghar.

In Telangana, the Godavari River crossed the 43-foot warning level at Bhadrachalam, prompting evacuations from vulnerable areas. Heavy inflows into major reservoirs led to warnings in several districts, with damages estimated at Rs 335 crore.

In Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar transferred Rs 456 crore to 6.5 lakh flood-affected families in 12 districts, while Delhi reported the Yamuna river flowing below danger levels at 204.76 metres, with authorities maintaining round-the-clock monitoring. Authorities remain on high alert across affected regions as more rain is forecast. *—PTI*

Drive as dark clouds hover in the sky, in Mumbai, Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

- In Telangana, the Godavari River crossed the 43-foot warning level at Bhadrachalam, prompting evacuations from vulnerable areas. Heavy inflows into major reservoirs led to warnings in several districts of the state.

Heavy rains trigger flash floods, landslides in J&K

JAMMU, 20 AUG

Heavy rains have triggered flash floods, landslides and severe traffic disruptions across Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Wednesday. The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was partially blocked after torrential rain turned a stretch near the Ban toll plaza into a river-like flow, while a massive landslide on the Mughal road at Ratta Chham left several vehicles stranded. Landslides were also reported in Ramban, Chenani and Kishtwar districts. Several mud houses were damaged in Poonch and Rajouri, while rivers including the Chenab, Tawi, Ujh and Basantar are flowing dangerously fast, flooding low-lying areas. Officials cautioned against landslides *—Agencies*

TO BE PROBED

School play depicts burqa-clad girls as 'terrorists' in Gujarat

BHAVNAGAR, 20 AUG

The Gujarat Education Department has sought a report after a primary school in Bhavnagar staged an Independence Day play that depicted burqa-clad girls as "terrorists", triggering a controversy.

A notice to the school was issued after local Muslims, under the banner of 'Bandharan Bachao Samiti', urged officials to take stern action against the school's teachers for depicting their community in a "bad light" through the play.

A viral video of the play showed few girls in white dresses performing on a song describing the beauty of Kashmir. Moments later, three burqa-clad girls carrying "guns" enter the scene and "shoot" the others, while an audio in the background says that "terrorists had killed iciviliians during the Pahalgam attack". The school has to reply within a week. *—PTI*

Local Muslims urged Gujarat Educations Department officials to take stern action for depicting their community in a wong way *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Abbas Ansari's conviction in hate speech quashed

PRAYAGRAJ, 20 AUG

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday quashed the conviction of Mukhtar Ansari's son Abbas Ansari in a 2022 hate speech case.

The ccourt set aside a special MP MLA court order sentencing him to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 2,000.

Abbas moved the appellate court, which rejected his challenge, following which he moved the high court for the relief.

Abbas' election agent, Mansoor Ansari was also convicted in the case and sentenced to six months in jail.

The then MLA of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party from Mau Sadar assembly constituency allegedly threatened state government officials of consequences if Samajwadi Party came to power after the 2022 assembly election.

He won the 2022 assembly election by over 38,000 votes from the Mau seat. *—PTI*

- Abbas moved the appellate court, which rejected his challenge, following which he moved the high court for relief. His election agent, Mansoor Ansari was also convicted.

Class 10 student killed by junior in Gujarat school

AHMEDABAD, 20 AUG

A class 10 student of a private school in Ahmedabad was stabbed to death allegedly by his junior after a minor scuffle, following which a mob vandalised the school on Wednesday.

The student was stabbed by a class 9 student on 19 August and died during treatment later at night.

On Wednesday, a mob ransacked the Seventh Day Adventist School premises and thrashed its staff.

Gujarat Education Minister Praful Pansheriya said the minor accused was detained. He appealed to the people to maintain peace."A class 9 student murdered a class 10 student at a school in Ahmedabad, which is an unfortunate," Pansheriya said. *—PTI*

RSF fighters burn Sudanese village killing 7

CAIRO, 20 AUG

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ambushed a village in south-central Sudan, looting and burning several houses, a medical group said Wednesday. At least seven people, including two children, were killed, it said. Tuesday's attack by the RSF on the village of al-Ghabshan al-Maramrah, an agricultural community in North Kordofan province, also wounded 13 others, said the Sudan Doctors Network, a group of medical professionals tracking the Sudanese civil war. The group said RSF fighters looted properties, burned several houses as well as the village's sole health care centre, and "stole the medical supplies stored there." The attack on the Kordofan village came as the RSF attempted to seize control of the oil-rich region. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Colombian ex-prez Uribe freed from house arrest

BOGOTA, 20 AUG

A Colombian appeals court has ordered the release of former president Álvaro Uribe from house arrest while he appeals his 12-year sentence for bribery and witness tampering. Uribe, who governed from 2002 to 2010, was convicted on 1 August of attempting to coerce imprisoned former paramilitaries into changing testimony linking him to the creation of the Bloque Metro paramilitary group in the 1990s. The Superior Tribunal in Bogotá ruled that the detention order violated Uribe's right to due process and was based on "vague reasoning." Uribe denies the charges, arguing the evidence was obtained illegally. The court dismissed concerns he might flee, noting he has consistently returned from foreign trips. —*PTI*

Over 12,000 South Koreans sue ex-president Yoon

SEOUL, 20 AUG

Over 12,000 South Korean citizens have filed a lawsuit against former president Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife, Kim Keon Hee, over his declaration of martial law in December last year, Yonhap News Agency reported. The suit, lodged at the Seoul Central District Court by lawyer Kim Kyeong-ho, represents 12,225 plaintiffs, each seeking ₹100,000 (around £56) in damages. Plaintiffs argue Yoon's actions violated constitutional rights and undermined democracy, while Kim is accused of supporting the decision and held financially accountable. The case follows a ruling last month ordering Yoon to pay compensation to 104 individuals in a similar lawsuit, which he has appealed. —*ANI*

Pak PM orders probe into $50B gas scam

ISLAMBAD, 20 AUG

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered a high-level inquiry into a PKR 50 billion gas billing scandal that has left thousands of industrial and CNG consumers facing retroactive charges dating back nearly a decade, Dawn reported. The controversy centres on Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited, which recently issued revised bills based on updated RLNG price notifications from the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority. The bills, covering 2015–2022, were issued after Ogra "actualised" RLNG prices in December 2024, years after the original period. Businesses including 2,950 industrial and 1,200 CNG consumers are outraged, arguing they cannot recover past costs as products have long been sold or exported. The dispute has also exposed a PKR 76 billion gap between RLNG rates and subsidised prices. —*ANI*

Israel approves plan for Gaza invasion

IDF calls up 60K reserved forces; Israel okays plan to occupy and divide West Bank

TEL AVIV, 20 AUG

Israel has approved plans to takeover Gaza city, the Defence Ministry said. Israel Katz, the Defence Minister approved plans to call up 60,000 reservists and lengthen the service of an additional 20,000 reservists.

An Israeli military official said on Wednesday that the country's top generals approved plans to begin a new phase of operations in some of Gaza's most densely populated areas.

The move is the "next phase of Operation Gideon's Chariots", the Israel Defence Forces wrote on X.

The new phase of combat would involve "a gradual precise and targeted operation in and around Gaza City," including some areas where forces had not previously operated, another military officials said.

This comes days after Hamas made a ceasefire renewed proposal, which Qatari and Egyptian mediators urged Israel to consider.

Israel also gave final approval for a controversial settlement project in the occupied West Bank that would effectively cut the territory in two. Palestinians and rights groups it could destroy plans for a future Palestinian state.

Settlement development in E1, an open tract of land east of Jerusalem, has been under consideration for more than two decades, but was frozen due to US pressure during previous administrations.

On Wednesday, the project received final approval from the Planning and Building Committee. The plan includes around 3,500 apartments to expand the settlement of Maale Adumim, far-Right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said during a press conference at the site last Thursday.

Infrastructure work could begin in the next few months and construction of homes could start in around a year.

The location of E1 is significant because it is one of the last geographical links between Ramallah, in the northern West Bank, and Bethlehem in the southern West Bank.

The two cities are 22km apart by air, but Palestinians travelling between them must take a wide detour and pass through multiple Israeli checkpoints, adding hours to the journey. The hope for final status negotiations for a Palestinian state was to have the region eventually serve as a direct link between the cities. More than 700,000 Israelis now live in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories captured by Israel in 1967 and sought by the Palestinians for a future state. —*PTI*

The new Israeli plan is described as the next phase of 'Operation Gideon's Chariots' PHOTO: PTI

56 PEOPLE WERE KILLED in Gaza during a renewed Israeli offensive on Wednesday. Three people starved to death in the Strip

Syria, Israel officials meet for ceasefire

Syria's foreign minister held a rare direct meeting with an Israeli delegation in Paris on Tuesday, talks that were brokered by the US as part of a diplomatic push for Syria and Israel to normalise relations. Syria's state-run SANA news agency said Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani met with Israeli officials to discuss de-escalating tensions and restoring a 1974 ceasefire agreement — a deal that established a demilitarised separation zone between Israeli and Syrian forces and stationed a UN peacekeeping force to maintain calm. While there is a history of conflict between the two nations, Israel escalated the issue by bombing Syria's Sweida during the recent sectarian clashes.

Bibi calls Aus PM 'weak', says Macron fuels anti-semitism

MELBOURNE, 20 AUG

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Wednesday brushed off accusations from his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu that the Australian leader is a "weak politician who had betrayed Israel" by recognising a Palestinian state.

"History will remember Albanese for what he is: A weak politician who betrayed Israel and abandoned Australia's Jews," Netanyahu said.

Anthony Albanese, Benjamin Netanyahu, Emmanuel Macron PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Albanese responded: "I treat leaders of other countries with respect. I engage with them in a diplomatic way."

Netanyahu also accused French President Emmanuel Macron of fuelling "the anti-Semitic fire" in France by planning to recognise Palestinian statehood.

"This is a time for seriousness and responsibility, not for conflation and manipulation," Macron's office responded. —*Agencies*

Israel approves USD 1.4B plan to make tanks, armoured vehicles

The Israeli government has approved a major plan to accelerate the production of Merkava tanks and the Tiger and Eitan armoured personnel carriers, with a budget exceeding NIS 5 billion (USD 1.4 billion). The Armor Acceleration Program, led by the Merkava and Vehicle Administration, will expand production infrastructure nationwide, including in peripheral regions, and increase the pool of domestic suppliers. The plan now awaits approval from the Knesset's Defense Budget Committee.

NATO holds calls on security guarantees for Ukraine

KYIV, 20 AUG

NATO Defence Chiefs were due to hold a virtual meeting Wednesday, a senior alliance official said, as countries pushing for an end to Russia's war on Ukraine devise possible future security guarantees for Kyiv that could help forge a peace agreement.

Italian Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, chair of NATO's Military Committee, said that 32 Defence Chiefs from across the alliance would hold a video conference as a US-led diplomatic push seeks to end the fighting.

US Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe, will take part in the talks, Dragone said on X.

US President Donald Trump met last Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska and on Monday hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and prominent European leaders at the White House.

"We need strong security guarantees to ensure a truly secure and lasting peace," Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post Wednesday after Russian missile and drone strikes hit six regions of Ukraine overnight.

Kyiv's European allies are looking to set up a force that could backstop any peace agreement, and a coalition of 30 countries, including European nations, Japan and Australia, have signed up to support the initiative. —*PTI*

US to screen for 'anti-Americanism'

WASHINGTON, 20 AUG

Immigrants seeking a legal pathway to live and work in the United States will now be subject to screening for "anti-Americanism'," authorities said Tuesday. Critics say that it gives officers too much leeway in rejecting foreigners based on a subjective judgment.

US Citizenship and Immigration Services said officers will now consider whether an applicant for benefits, such as a green card, "endorsed, promoted, supported, or otherwise espoused" anti-American, terrorist or antisemitic views.

"America's benefits should not be given to those who despise the country and promote anti-American ideologies," Matthew Tragesser, USCIS spokesman, said. "Immigration benefits — including to live and work in the United States — remain a privilege, not a right."

It isn't specified what constitutes anti-Americanism and it isn't clear how and when the directive would be applied.

"They are opening the door for stereotypes and prejudice and implicit bias to take the wheel in these decisions. That's really worrisome," said Jane Lilly Lopez, Associate Professor of Sociology at Brigham Young University.

The policy changes follow others recently implemented since the start of the Trump administration including social media vetting and the most recent addition of assessing applicants seeking naturalisation for 'good moral character'. That will not only consider "not simply the absence of misconduct" but also factor the applicant's positive attributes and contributions. —*PTI*

S Korea will never be our partner: Kim's sister

SEOUL, 20 AUG

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister said her country will never see South Korea as a partner, taunting Seoul's new efforts to mend ties.

Kim Yo Jong, who is one of North Korea's top foreign policy officials and believed to be the second most powerful person in the country, denounced the ongoing South Korea-US military drills as a "reckless" invasion rehearsal and claimed Seoul's peace gestures conceal a "sinister intention".

Kim Yo Jong call the South as the "top-class faithful dog" of the US and that the reparation of inter-Korean relations desired by Seoul "will never" happen.

She added that the South "will not even have a subordinate role in the regional diplomatic arena," which she claimed will be centred on the North. —*PTI*

Trump slams museums for recording slavery

Trump lashed out at "woke" museums for showing "how bad slavery was" and not showing anything about "success" and "the future". On Truth Social, Trump said he has instructed his attorneys to go through museums "and start the exact same process that has been done with Colleges and Universities where tremendous progress has been made".

Justice Dept fact checks DC's crime data

The Justice Department has opened an investigation into whether police officials in Washington, DC, have falsified crime data, a source said. The investigation comes amid an escalating political showdown between the Trump administration and the city over control of the police department. The mayor's office declined to comment on the matter.

Clearances for 37 current, ex officials revoked

The Trump administration has said that it was revoking the security clearances of 37 current and former national security officials in the latest act of retribution. A memo from Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard accuses the individuals of having engaged in the "politicisation or weaponisation of intelligence" to advance personal or partisan goals.

Trump wants 10 per cent stake in Intel

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Tuesday confirmed the US government is vying for a 10 per cent stake in Silicon Valley pioneer Intel in a deal that would deepen the Trump administration's financial ties with major computer chip manufacturers and punctuate a dramatic about-face from the President's recent push to oust the company's CEO.

ESPECIALLY IN CONFLICT ZONES

'Aid cuts left sexual violence victims helpless'

UNITED NATIONS, 20 AUG

Major cuts in humanitarian aid have left victims of sexual violence in conflicts around the world without lifesaving help as clinics and shelters close, a senior UN official warned.

Pramila Patten, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, lashed out at the UN Security Council and the broader international community for making essential services for survivors the "least accessible at the very moment they are needed most".

In conflict-torn eastern Congo, clinics are forced to turn away rape survivors because they aren't able to provide basic care, she said.

And in conflicts in Sudan, Ukraine, northeastern Ethiopia and Gaza, "health care systems have been decimated" and humanitarian groups are having to do more with less to help victims, Patten said.

In conflict areas like Sudan, Ukraine, northeastern Ethiopia and Gaza, 'health care systems have been decimated' PHOTO: UNICEF

Patten warned that as "militarism is on the march and the clock is being turned back on women's rights".

Patten was presenting UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' annual report on sexual violence in conflicts, which was released last week and showed a 25 per cent increase in cases last year.

The UN Chief reported that more than 4,600 people survived sexual violence in 2024, with armed groups carrying out the majority of the abuse but some committed by government forces.

The highest number of cases were in the Central African Republic, Congo, Haiti, Somalia and South Sudan.

Patten stressed the unseen faces, citing as one example a young woman who boarded a bus in Sudan's capital to collect her college diploma and was dragged off by four members of a paramilitary force, gang-raped and left unconscious in a dark alley.

She became pregnant and is struggling to care for her baby and deal with her trauma. —*PTI*

Bus crash kills 79 Afghans returning from Iran

KABUL, 20 AUG

A bus crash in northwestern Afghanistan killed at least 79 people returning from Iran, including 19 children, an official said.

Two people were also injured in the crash, Ministry of Interior spokesperson Abdul Mateen Qani told The Associated Press.

Tolo News, citing the official, said the accident happened Tuesday around 8.30 pm local time in Herat province. The bus collided with a truck and a motorbike, causing a massive fire that killed many on the spot, the outlet reported.

Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, mainly due to poor road conditions and driver carelessness.

Nearly 1.8 million Afghans have been forcibly returned from Iran in the past few months. A further 184,459 were sent back from Pakistan and more than 5,000 were deported from Turkiye since the beginning of the year. Additionally, nearly 10,000 Afghan prisoners have been repatriated, mostly from Pakistan.

The Taliban criticised neighbouring countries in July for the mass expulsion of Afghans, as Iran and Pakistan expel foreigners who they say are living there illegally. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation said some 6 million Afghan refugees remain overseas. —*PTI*

- Tolo News , said the accident happened Tuesday around 8.30 pm in Herat province. The bus collided with a truck and a motorbike, causing a massive fire.

Gold drops by Rs 400 to Rs 1,00,020/10g

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Gold prices dropped Rs 400 to Rs 1,00,020 per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday due to continuous selling by stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 1,00,420 per 10g in the previous market close. In the local market, gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 350 to Rs 99,700 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. It had closed at Rs 1,00,050 per 10g on Tuesday. Additionally, silver prices plunged Rs 1,500 to Rs 1,12,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. In the overseas markets, spot gold was trading marginally higher at USD 3,326.04 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee rises by 6P, closes at 87.07 against USD

MUMBAI, 20 AUG

Rupee pared initial losses and settled on a higher note at 87.07 (provisional) against the US dollar, up by 6 paise on the back of a rise in risk appetite in global markets. Forex traders said easing tensions over trade tariffs and hopes of peace between Russia and Ukraine enthused investors. Moreover, the proposed GST reforms and a recent credit rating upgrade by a foreign agency have bolstered confidence in the Indian economy. The local unit opened lower at 87.16 but later recovered losses to hit a high of 86.98 against the greenback, as GST rationalisation and easing worries over additional tariffs by the US supported investor sentiment. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee settled at 87.07 (provisional), registering a gain of 6 paise over its previous close. *—PTI*

Andhra CM launches Tata Innovation Hubs

AMARAVATI, 20 AUG

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday inaugurated Ratan Tata Innovation Hubs (RTIHs) at Amaravati and five more centres in the state. The CM was accompanied by Tata Group chairman N Chandrasekaran and other officials. CM Naidu inaugurated the RTIH zonal centres of Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Vijayawada, Anantapur and Tirupati virtually from the Amaravati hub. Named after former chairman of the Tata conglomerate, Ratan Tata, the RTIHs will foster innovation, entrepreneurship ecosystem and mentor startups. The five zonal centres will be mentored by reputed business groups to facilitate technology and skill upgradation in emerging sectors. *—PTI*

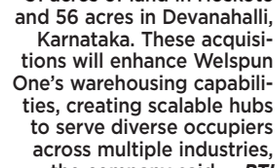


PHOTO: PTI

Welspun One acquires 107 acres of land in K'taka

MUMBAI, 20 AUG

Welspun Group-backed warehousing and logistics platform Welspun One Logistics Parks (WOLP) on Wednesday announced it has acquired two land parcels totalling 107 acres in southern India for two warehousing projects. With this acquisition, the company's total footprint has expanded to over 260 acres across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, marking a significant step in strengthening its pan-South India presence, Welspun One said. This portfolio represents a development potential of over 6 million sq ft, supported by a committed investment of USD 250 million (Rs 2,150 crore), the company said. Welspun One said it has acquired around 51 acres of land in Hoskote and 56 acres in Devanahalli, Karnataka. These acquisitions will enhance Welspun One's warehousing capabilities, creating scalable hubs to serve diverse occupiers across multiple industries, the company said. *—PTI*

Indian Oil, BPCL resume purchasing Russian oil

Reports claimed imports were paused in July amid US tariffs

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, 20 AUG

The company stated that the Indian government has not yet given a formal order on the import of Russian oil *PHOTO: PTI*

Amidst the widened discounts, refiners, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) have restarted buying Russian oil for the upcoming months, which may cause a reduction in supplies for top buyer China, said sources.

According to news agency Reuters' report, the imports were paused in July because of the limited discounted.

Another reason for the halt was that US President Donald Trump threatened imposing of an extra 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports as a penalty to New Delhi's continuous import of Russian oil, it said.

Sources stated that the current discount on Russia's Urals crude has widened to about USD 3 per barrel, once again becoming an appealing offer for Indian refiners.

Other than Urals, IOC has bought Varandey and Siberian Light, which are other grades of Russian crude, it said.

According to sources, an official from the Russian embassy in New Delhi earlier today said that Russia will resume its oil supplies to India, adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a meeting soon regarding the matter.

Sources said the IOC on Monday said that it will resume importing Russian oil, stating it as a "business decision", adding that in fiscal year 2024-2025, Russia supplied 22 per cent of the company's crude.

The company stated that the Indian government has not yet given a formal order on the import of Russian oil.

An IOC statement said, "Neither are we being told to buy nor told not to buy. We are not making extra efforts to either increase or decrease the share of Russian crude."

Sources said that the US, multiple times before, had alleged that India purchasing oil from Russia is an indirect method of funding Ukraine war, adding that White House trade adviser Peter Navarro said "In effect, India acts as a global clearinghouse for Russian oil, converting embargoed crude into high-value exports while giving Moscow the dollars it needs." *—Agencies*

SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Tariffs to hit textiles, diamonds & chemical MSMEs hard: CRISIL

KOLKATA, 20 AUG

The imposition of higher tariffs by the US will significantly impact the micro, small and medium enterprise sector, which accounts for around 45 per cent of India's exports, while MSMEs in textiles, diamonds and chemicals are likely to be the most hit, a report by CRISIL Intelligence said.

The US levies ad valorem duty of 25 per cent on Indian goods. However, it has imposed an additional 25 per cent tariff which will be effective from 27 August this year, the report said.

Textiles, gems and jewellery, which account for 25 per cent of India's exports to US, are likely to be most affected. The MSMEs have more than 70 per cent share in these sectors and will be hit hard, report said.

Another sector which is likely to face the heat is chemicals, where MSMEs have a 40 per cent share.

The gems and jewellery sector at Surat in Gujarat, which dominates diamond exports, will feel the tariff shock, the report said. Diamonds account for over 50 per cent of the country's gems and jewellery exports, and the US is a major consumer, according to the report.

In chemicals too, India faces competition from Japan and South Korea which are subject to lower tariffs.

In steel, the tariffs are expected to have a negligible impact on the MSMEs as the units are mostly engaged in re-rolling and long products.

In the textiles sector, the ready-made garments are expected to lose ground in US compared with peers facing lower tariffs. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

NCLT defers Vedanta's demerger hearing to 17 Sept

MUMBAI, 20 AUG

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Wednesday deferred the hearing on Vedanta Ltd's proposed demerger to 17 September, as market regulator Sebi is yet to complete the scrutiny of the proposal, while the central government has raised certain objections. The matter, which was part-heard earlier, had been adjourned to 20 August.

On 2 July, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had objected to Vedanta's proposed demerger before the NCLT Mumbai bench.

Meanwhile, the tribunal was informed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) that it has no further comments on the proposed demerger scheme and is verifying Vedanta's compliance with applicable regulatory norms.

The NSE legal counsel also confirmed that a no-objection certificate has been issued for the demerger. However, the legal representative from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas requested additional time to present the ministry's observations on the scheme at the next hearing.

In a statement, Vedanta said the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has filed its representation before NCLT Mumbai and the company has filed its response.

In September 2023, Vedanta had announced its demerger plan, proposing to create four independent listed companies.

In March 2025, the deadline for the demerger was extended to 30 September, 2025. *—PTI*

Vedanta shares dip nearly 3% on demerger setback

Vedanta Ltd shares fell 2.56 per cent to Rs 438.55 on Wednesday following setbacks to its proposed demerger. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) deferred the hearing to 17 September after the government raised serious objections, citing concealed liabilities, inflated revenues, and lack of disclosure. Meanwhile, SEBI criticised Vedanta for altering the demerger scheme after receiving regulatory clearance, calling it a breach of rules and issuing a formal warning. *—Agencies*

SENSEX CLIMBS 213 PTS

Markets log gains for 5th day

MUMBAI, 20 AUG

PHOTO: PTI

Benchmark BSE Sensex closed higher by 213 points on Wednesday, extending its rally to the fifth consecutive day on heavy buying in IT and FMCG shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 213.45 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 81,857.84 with 15 of its constituents ending higher and the rest with losses. During the day, it jumped 341.23 points or 0.41 per cent to 81,985.62.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged higher by 69.90 points or 0.28 per cent to 25,050.55.

Among Sensex firms, Infosys surged the most by 3.88 per cent, followed by Tata Consultancy Services, which climbed 2.69 per cent. Hindustan Unilever, NTPC, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra, Eternal and HCL Tech were also among the gainers.

However, Bharat Electronics, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors and Trent were among the laggards.

Reliance Industries dropped over half a per cent, capping gains in the key index.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.39 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.30 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT jumped 2.70 per cent, IT (2.61 per cent), teck (2.22 per cent), FMCG (1.36 per cent), realty (1.04 per cent) and telecommunication (0.68 per cent).

Bankex, oil & gas, financial services and energy were the laggards.

Investors turned their attention towards US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's forthcoming statements at the Jackson Hole Symposium and minutes from the Fed's recent meeting.

Rising for the fourth trading day in a row on Tuesday, the Sensex edged higher by 370.64 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 81,644.39. The Nifty climbed 103.70 points or 0.42 per cent to 24,980.65. *—PTI*

GST 2.0 to boost consumption by ₹5.31L cr: SBI

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The recent Goods and Services Tax (GST) rationalisation, dubbed GST 2.0, is expected to lift consumption by Rs 1.98 lakh crore in FY26, despite an estimated revenue loss of Rs 85,000 crore, according to an SBI report.

Combined with earlier income tax cuts, the total boost to consumption is projected at Rs 5.31 lakh crore, equivalent to around 1.6 per cent of GDP.

The income tax reductions alone, which cost the exchequer Rs 1 lakh crore, have added Rs 3.33 lakh crore to household spending by increasing disposable incomes. The report explains that GST rationalisation acts as an effective cut in indirect taxes, thereby increasing purchasing power.

Despite short-term revenue losses, a consumption b oost of Rs 5.5 lakh crore could generate Rs 52,000 crore in additional GST revenue, shared equally between Centre and states. *—ANI*

India must cut reliance on China amid trade deficit: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

PHOTO: FREEPIK

China's decision to ease restrictions on exports of rare-earth minerals and fertilisers to India is a positive step, but India must urgently reduce its heavy dependence on its neighbour, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) warned on Wednesday.

India's trade deficit with China hit a record $100 billion in FY2025, driven by China's dominance across almost every industrial sector. Between 2014-2024, Beijing's control over India's import basket widened significantly: it supplies 57.2 per cent of telecom and electronics imports, 44 per cent of machinery and hardware, and 28.3 per cent of chemicals & pharmaceuticals. Critical sectors heavily reliant on China: 97.7 per cent of erythromycin imports, 96.8per cent of silicon wafers, 86 per cent of flat panel displays, 82.7 per cent of solar cells, and 75.2 per cent lithiumion batteries.

GTRI said this reliance gives Beijing strategic leverage & undermines Indian industry. It urged India to invest in deep manufacturing, strengthen MSMEs, and build resilient supply chains. *—PTI*

Five firms get Sebi's approval to launch IPOs

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

PHOTO: PTI

Five companies, including Innovatiview India and Park Medi World, have received approval from Sebi to launch their initial public offerings (IPOs). Others include Runwal Enterprises, Jinkushal Industries, and Advance Agrolife.

Innovatiview India's IPO is an Offer For Sale (OFS) worth up to Rs 2,000 crore. Park Medi World aims to raise Rs 1,260 crore through a Rs 900 crore fresh issue and a Rs 300 crore OFS. Runwal Enterprises plans a fresh issue of Rs 1,000 crore, to be used for debt repayment, investments in subsidiaries, and future project acquisitions. Jinkushal Industries will issue 86.5 lakh fresh shares and 10 lakh via OFS. Advance Agrolife will issue 1.92 crore new shares.

Meanwhile, Regaal Resources debuted with a 39 per cent premium on BSE, listing at Rs 141.80 against its IPO price of Rs 102. Rs 306 crore IPO was heavily subscribed, with Rs 159 crore of proceeds for loan repayment. *—PTI*

Assam to build resting shelters for Cachar tea workers

SILCHAR, 20 AUG

The Cachar district administration in Assam has intensified efforts to implement the Cha Shramik Aashray Yojana (CSAY), aimed at providing resting facilities with toilets for tea estate workers.

District Commissioner Mridul Yadav chaired a review meeting to identify suitable land across tea estates and ensure that construction begins without administrative delays.

The scheme, a flagship initiative of the Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare Department, seeks to improve the working and living conditions of tea labourers.

Each facility will cost Rs 5.16 lakh, with the number of shelters determined by the size of the estate: one for gardens up to 500 hectares, two for those between 500 and 700 hectares, and three for estates above 700 hectares.

Construction committees will be formed, and bank accounts finalised for direct fund transfers to speed up implementation. *—PTI*

'STRIKE A DEATH KNELL'

Online Gaming Bill to destroy over 2L jobs, 400 firms

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The online gaming industry has raised alarm that the government's proposed Online Gaming Bill, 2025 seeking to ban all real money games, including those based on skill, could result in massive job losses and closure of companies.

Industry bodies have written to Home Minister Amit Shah urging urgent intervention to protect responsible Indian gaming platforms.

In a joint letter, the All India Gaming Federation (AIGF), E-Gaming Federation (EGF) and the Federation of India Fantasy Sports (FIFS) said that the Bill, if passed, would "destroy over 2 lakh jobs, result in over 400 companies shutting down, and weaken India's position as a digital innovator."

The bodies stressed that the move would strike a "death knell" for a legitimate, fast-growing sector that has been contributing significantly to the economy.

The industry highlighted that online skill gaming is a sunrise sector with an enterprise valuation of over Rs 2 lakh crores, generating Rs 31,000 crores in annual revenue and contributing more than Rs 20,000 crores in taxes.

It has been growing at 20 per cent CAGR and is expected to double by 2028. India's online gamers grew from 36 crores in 2020 to more than 50 crores in 2024, while foreign direct investment in the sector crossed Rs 25,000 crores till June 2022.

The letter warned that shutting down regulated Indian platforms would push crores of users into the hands of illegal matka networks, offshore gambling websites, and unregulated operators.

These entities, the industry cautioned, operate without consumer safeguards, taxation, or accountability, posing risks of fraud, exploitation, and national security threats.

They added that thousands of startups, engineers, and content creators rely on this ecosystem for their livelihoods, and a blanket prohibition would kill future opportunities.

The federations urged the government to consider progressive regulation instead of prohibition, noting that the industry has the potential to become one of the cornerstones of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a USD 1 trillion digital economy.

They also requested an urgent meeting with Amit Shah's office to present their case and suggest solutions that ensure responsible gaming while safeguarding users.

The Bill, to be moved by Electronics and Information Technology Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, seeks to establish a national-level framework to regulate online gaming sector, while prohibiting money games that operate across states or from foreign jurisdictions. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Saurabh-Suruchi wins 10m air pistol mixed team bronze

SHYMKENT, 20 AUG

The Indian pair of Saurabh Chaudhary and rising teenage star Suruchi Inder Singh clinched the 10m air pistol mixed team bronze, beating Chinese Taipei in the Asian Shooting Championships here on Wednesday. The duo defeated Liu Heng-Yu and Hsieh Hsiang-Chen 17-9 to add to the individual bronze that double Olympic-medallist Manu Bhaker had won in the women's 10m air pistol competition on Tuesday. The Indian pair qualified for the medal round, placed fifth with Suruchi firing 292 and Saurabh scoring 286. The duo aggregated 578 in the qualification round to be placed fifth going into the eight-team medal round. Suruchi, who has been on song this season, winning four World Cup medals, started the qualification round with a perfect 100 in the opening series, faltered in the second to score 94, and ended the preliminary round with a 98.—*PTI*

Salah and Caldentey voted player of year

LONDON, 20 AUG

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah and Arsenal midfielder Mariona Caldentey were voted the men's and women's player of the year in English soccer for last season at the Professional Footballers' Association awards on Tuesday. For Salah, it marks a record third time he has won the award that is voted for by his fellow professionals. The 33-year-old Egypt international scored 29 goals and provided 18 assists in the Premier League as Liverpool powered to a record-equaling 20th English top-flight championship. Salah also collected the Football Writers' Association's Footballer of the Year award for a third time earlier in the year.—*PTI*

SAFF U-17 Women's C'ship: India thrash Nepal 7-0

THIMPHU, 20 AUG

The Indian women's team kicked off its SAFF Under-17 Women's Championship 2025 campaign with style after thrashing Nepal 7-0 on Wednesday at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, Bhutan. The Young Tigresses led 5-0 at half-time courtesy a brace from Abhista Basnett and a goal apiece from Nira Chanu Longjam, Anushka Kumari, and Julan Nongmaithem. Nira bagged her second goal a few minutes before the hour mark, before Anushka also scored her second of the match. Bangladesh and Bhutan being the other two sides play six matches. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@BROAD

Ex-England pacer Broad keen to take up coaching role

LONDON, 20 AUG

His illustrious career now a part of England's cricketing folklore, legendary pace bowler Stuart Broad is planning a move towards a coaching role where he can someday produce the likes of Jofra Archer and Jimmy Anderson. Broad, the second-highest wicket-taking pace bowler in Test cricket after country-mate Anderson, says he has spoken to Rob Key, managing director of the England cricket team, and expressed his desire to groom the U-17 and U-19 players. "It's certainly something I want to stay connected to, the coaching," Broad, who has taken 604 Test wickets. —*PTI*

Indian men's hockey team announced for AC

Rajinder and Dilpreet are retaining their places in the squad

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

There were no major surprises in the 18-member Indian men's hockey team picked for the upcoming Asia Cup in Rajgir, Bihar, with midfielders Rajinder Singh and Dilpreet Singh retaining their places in the squad, announced on Wednesday.

The tournament is scheduled to be held from 29 August to 7 September, and the winner will earn direct qualification to next year's FIH men's World Cup, to be co-hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands from 18 June to 8 July. Ace drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh will continue to serve as captain of the team.

The trio of Rajinder, Lakra, and Dilpreet was also part of the jumbo squad for the preceding tour of Australia. Rajinder came in for Shamsher Singh, Lakra is filling in for the recently retired Lalit Upadhyay, and Dilpreet was preferred over Gurjant Singh, who was ignored for the matches against Australia.

Striker Lalit Upadhyay had retired from international hockey after the European leg of the FIH Pro League in June.

The selection largely reflected the established core of players, with a focus on the forthcoming World Cup.

The squad overall features a strong group of experienced campaigners, with depth and balance across all departments.

The World Cup qualifying tournament places India in Pool A with Japan, China, and Kazakhstan. Hosts India will begin their campaign against China on 29 August, before facing Japan on 31 August and Kazakhstan on 1 September.

The goalkeeping duties will be shared by Krishan B Pathak and Suraj Karkera. In defence, Harmanpreet and Amit Rohidas will be joined by Jarmanpreet Singh, Sumit, Sanjay, and Jugraj Singh.

The midfield engine room comprises Manpreet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Rajinder, Raj Kumar Pal, and Hardik Singh. The forward line will be spearheaded by Mandeep Singh, Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Lakra, and Dilpreet, offering plenty of firepower to trouble opposition defences.

Meanwhile, Nilam Sanjeep Xess and Selvam Karthi have been named as alternate athletes.

Speaking on the team selection, head coach Craig Fulton said, "We've gone with an experienced squad that understands what it takes to perform in high-pressure situations."

"The Asia Cup is crucial for us because qualification for the World Cup is at stake, so we need players who have the composure, resilience, and know-how to deliver.

"The selection reflects our intent — to put forward a team that can compete strongly and achieve our main objective."

"I'm very pleased with the balance and quality across the squad. We have leaders in every line defence, midfield, and attack and that collective strength is what excites me the most. I think the way this team can play together will be our strongest asset," he added. —*PTI*

INDIAN SQUAD:

GOALKEEPERS: Krishan B Pathak, Suraj KarkeraDEFENDERS: Sumit, Jarmanpreet Singh, Sanjay, Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh

MIDFIELDERS: Rajinder Singh, Raj Kumar Pal, Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad

FORWARDS: Mandeep Singh, Shilanand Lakra, Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Dilpreet Singh

ALTERNATE ATHLETES: Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Selvam Karthi.

India will qualify for the Hockey World Cup by winning the Asia Cup 2025 PHOTO: PTI

LA LIGA OPENER

Real Madrid beat Osasuna on a Mbappe penalty

MADRID, 20 AUG

Kylian Mbappé got off to a perfect start in his second season with Real Madrid, leading the team to a 1-0 victory over Osasuna in their Spanish league opener on Tuesday.

Mbappé, the leading scorer in his debut with Madrid last season, converted a 51st-minute penalty kick to give the hosts the victory. A nice run by Mbappé through the right side of the area, followed by a neat cutback move, prompted the foul.

The goal gave new coach Xabi Alonso a winning debut in his first full season with the club. The former Madrid player arrived before the Club World Cup to replace Carlo Ancelotti, who left to take the Brazil job.

Alonso started the match with three of the club's new signings for the season -- left back Álvaro Carreras, right back Trent Alexander-Arnold, and central defender Dean Huijsen. Teenage forward Franco Mastantuono came off the bench to replace Brahim Díaz in the 68th, being loudly cheered by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Some fans had not been happy after the former River Plate player praised Lionel Messi, the fellow Argentine who was a star at rival Barcelona during his introductory news conference.

The 18-year-old Mastantuono had a chance to score in the 89th, but his shot from inside the area was saved by the Osasuna goalkeeper.

Real Madrid got off to a winning start in Xabi Alonso's LaLiga debut as manager.

Barcelona began its title defense with a comfortable 3-0 win at nine-man Mallorca on Saturday, while Atletico Madrid squandered a late lead in a 2-1 loss at Espanyol on Sunday. Madrid was runner-up to Barcelona in the Spanish league last season. Osasuna finished ninth.. —*PTI*

Kylian Mbappe PHOTO: X/@Mbappe

Dhanalakshmi takes women's 100m gold

CHENNAI, 21 AUG

Unheralded S Tamil Arasu ran a stunning race to win the men's 100m gold while Dhanalakshmi Sekar clinched the women's corresponding event as Tamil Nadu's sprinters stole the show on the opening day of the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships here on Wednesday.

The 23-year-old Tamil Arasu, representing the home state, rocketed off the blocks and shifted into top gear to outdo his rivals to the finishing line.His gold-winning time of 10.22 seconds was better than the previous meet record of 10.27 seconds set by Punjab's Gurindervir Singh in 2021. Tamil Arasu's time was just 0.04 seconds away from Animesh Kujur's national record of 10.18 seconds set earlier this year. —*PTI*

Weary Iga wins US Open mixed doubles opener

ARTHUR, 20 AUG

Iga Swiatek shrugged off lingering weariness to partner Casper Ruud to back-to-back victories in the revamped mixed doubles competition at the US Open on Wednesday. Swiatek, who on Monday had battled through a two-hour tussle with Jasmine Paolini to win the Cincinnati Open, looked full of energy as she and Ruud powered into Wednesday's semi-finals. Swiatek and Ruud needed just 39 minutes to dispatch the US pairing of Madison Keys and Frances Tiafoe 4-1, 4-2 in their opening game at Arthur Ashe Stadium, and then reappeared roughly 20 minutes later to defeat Caty McNally and Lorenzo Musetti 5-3, 4-2 in their quarter-final clash.

The victories capped a gruelling 24 hours for Polish star Swiatek, who hot-footed it to the airport after

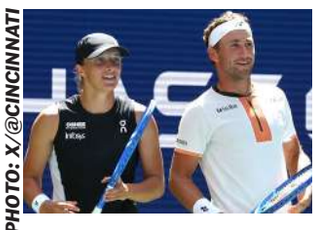


PHOTO: X/@CINCINNATI

Monday's win in Cincinnati and only arrived at her hotel in New York in the early hours of Tuesday.

"Honestly, the last two days have felt like one day, but I'm super happy to be here," Swiatek said.

Ruud and Swiatek had just enough time to fit in a quick practice before taking to the court in their first match as a doubles pairing.

"I was happy to team up with Iga," Ruud said afterwards. "She's on the winning train these days, so I'm just jumping on the train, and let's see if we can win some more before the mixed doubles is over. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sinquefield Cup: D Gukesh bounces back with superb win

ST. LOUIS, 20 AUG

World champion D Gukesh put his opening-round blues behind him and scored an excellent victory over former world rapid champion Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in the second round of the Sinquefield Cup here on Wednesday. On a day when R Praggnanandhaa played a quiet game to draw with Fabiano Caruana of the United States, Alireza Firouzja of France gave a perfect endgame lesson as he crashed through the defense of Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland in the other decisive game of the day.

Levon Aronian of the United States played out a draw with compatriot Samuel Sevian to remain in joint lead, while another American, Wesley So, drew with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France in the 10-player USD 3,75,000 prize-money tournament.

With seven rounds still to come, Praggnanandhaa, Aronian, and Firouzja share the lead on 1.5 points.

Gukesh moved to joint fourth place alongside Caruana, Wesley So, Sevian, and Vachier-Lagrave. Duda stands in ninth spot on half a point, while Abdusattorov is yet to open his account after losing his second game on the trot. Gukesh faced the open Sicilian, popularised by the legendary Viktor Korchnoi in the last century. —*PTI*

ONLINE GAMING BILL

Cricket industry's revenue could be hit

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

The 'Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill 2025', which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, could spell the end of "real money gaming platforms" that have stakes in the sponsorship market of Indian sports, most significantly cricket.

The contents of the bill, which aims to regulate one of the fastest-growing industries, are music to the ears for the Esports fraternity in the country. But the multi-billion-dollar fantasy gaming industry, comprising companies that have spent big money in sponsorship of cricket, might see a marked dip in their revenues.

And as a chain reaction, it could also affect the sports sponsorship market, including individual players' sponsorship and franchise-based domestic leagues of disciplines like kabaddi and football.

The Online Gaming Regulation Bill looks to create a regulatory body that will look after four diverse segments -- Esports, educational gaming, social and casual gaming, and real money gaming.

PHOTO: AI

Of these, there will be restrictions on online money games, states the document, which has PTI.

As per the "PROHIBITIONS" clause: "No person shall offer, aid, abet, induce, or otherwise indulge or engage in the offering of online money game and online money gaming service.

Cricket is one sport that has seen a huge influx of real money gaming, with the Indian team's title sponsor being Dream 11. My11Circle is the official fantasy sports partner of the money-spinning Indian Premier League. Dream11 brought the Indian team's title rights for about USD 44 million (Rs 358 crore approx). My11Circle brought IPL fantasy gaming rights for a fee of Rs 625 crore for five years (Rs 125 crore approx annually).

"No bank, financial institution, or any other person facilitating financial transactions or authorisation of funds shall engage in, permit, aid, abet, induce or otherwise facilitate any transaction or authorisation of funds towards payment for any online money gaming service."

"However, for this vision to truly materialise, it is critical that the terminology used in the bill, particularly the distinctions between esports, online gaming, social gaming, and online money gaming, be clearly defined and uniformly understood." —*PTI*

PRASAD TO RUN FOR KSCA CHIEF; RELEASES MANIFESTO

BENGALURU, 21 AUG

Bring cricket back to Chinnaswamy Stadium was the dominant theme of an august function where former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad took the first solid step towards contesting in the upcoming KSCA elections by releasing the manifesto of his panel on Wednesday. After the 4 June stampede here in which 11 Royal Challengers Bengaluru fans lost their lives, no matches have taken place at this iconic venue, which is now at risk of losing next month's ICC Women's World Cup matches. "That's something that shouldn't have happened, (stampede) honestly. We have to be very proactive in liaising with the (state) government. We have to ensure that matches are played in Chinnaswamy Stadium as soon as possible," said Prasad during a press conference here after revealing the manifesto. Prasad hinted that his panel of contestants will have 16 members, even though he refrained from naming them at this juncture.

The KSCA elections can be held in October or November as the incumbent regime, headed by Raghuram Bhat, will complete its three-year term on 30 September. —*PTI*

DIAMOND LEAGUE FINAL

Chopra to skip last leg meeting in Brussels

NEW DELHI, 20 AUG

Through to the high-profile Diamond League Finals, star Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will skip the last leg of the prestigious series in Brussels, Belgium, on Friday. Out of the 14 DL meetings, four have men's javelin throw on their roster.

Chopra competed in only two, but qualified for the DL Final to be held in Zurich, Switzerland, on 28 August. He had also skipped the Silesia leg on August 16.

The 27-year-old reigning world champion went past the coveted 90m mark at the Doha DL in May with a throw of 90.23m but finished second behind German Julian Weber. He then won the Paris DL with a throw of 88.16m in June.

Neeraj Chopra PHOTO: PTI

The top six after the Brussels leg will make it to the DL Finals in Zurich.

Chopra's last competitive outing was at the NC Classic on July 5 in Bengaluru, where he threw 86.18m to win the title at the event he hosted. In all, he has competed in six events so far this season, winning four times and finishing second twice.

Chopra will defend the title at the World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21.

Diamond League is an elite one-day meeting series in global athletics.

Athletes compete for points at the 14 series meetings in a bid to qualify for the two-day Diamond League Final, which will be held in Zurich on August 27 and 28.

The DL Final is a winner-takes-all competition, and the champion in each of the 32 events is crowned Diamond League champion.

Each champion is awarded the iconic Diamond Trophy and a wild card for the World Athletics Championships.

The men's javelin event will be held on 28 August. The winner of each event will get a trophy and USD 30,000 as prize money. —*PTI*

35 state karatekas win medals at Independence Cup

SHILLONG, 20 AUG

PHOTO: PTI

Karatekas from Meghalaya, including gold medallists Audrella Carisa Marbaniang and Nathaniel Levin Suting, returned with 41 medals from the 19th All India Independence Cup Karate Championship in New Delhi, officials said Wednesday.

The state's tally comprised 10 gold, 16 silver, and 15 bronze medals won in both kumite (sparring) and kata (choreographed movement). Altogether, 35 karatekas bagged medals, with six of them clinching two each and 29 securing one apiece, officials said. The double medallists were Dominica Phidahun Kharbani (one silver, one bronze), Esaranaki Kharjana (one gold, one silver), Ferrando Wanniang (one gold, one bronze), Mebapynhun Marngar (one silver, one bronze), Nathaniel Levin Suting (one gold, one silver), and Xenia Rose Nongsiej (two silver). The other gold winners were Aventinus George Mylliem, Eric Banteinam, Esaranaki Kharjana, Fadrik Wanniang, Ferrando Wanniang, Garret Ivan Lyngdoh, Lapyntngen Mary Lamin, and Samuel Kurbah. —*PTI*